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"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER X.

LESSONS.

NOEL HILL was of a somewhat enthusiastic disposition. He had distinct views of his own, and they had always been of a kind to improve and elevate the tone of general life. He had been quite famous at college, and great things had been prophesied of him. The serious bent of his mind had inclined him towards the Church, and it had been a great trial when his health broke down, and the fiat of science had gone forth, which decreed a voyage to Australia instead of the work he had desired to accomplish.

It was just when the question of that sea voyage was on the *tapis* that Noel Hill's father remembered he had a half-brother settled in some remote region of Australia from whom he heard at intervals of time extending over five or more years. It occurred to Mr. Hill, senior, that this gentleman might receive his son, and that being a clergyman also, the plan would suit both parties equally well.

Noel therefore departed armed with a letter of introduction to his uncle, and having found out that gentleman's place of abode and explained his own position, he was received with open arms. Mr. Payne was not at all sorry to have an assistant who would require no salary and whose abilities seemed unquestionable, and when Noel Hill informed him that he would much like to have a pupil or two with whom to read classics, he promised to do his best to procure them. He thought first of the Ormatroyds. Hex

was old enough to dip into Horace and Virgil, and have a grind at mathematics. Then there were the Sandersons: the father was—well, not to put too fine a point on it, there were rumours of convict ancestry; but the boys were fine, frank, intelligent fellows, and surely they would help to form a class independent of their school studies. He was quite sure it could be managed, and became quite enthusiastic on the subject as he broached it to the Ormatroyds. He met with no objection there; Mr. Ormatroyd had all an Englishman's belief in the virtue of Latin and Greek and conic sections, and was only too pleased that his son should have the chance of such valuable instruction as could be procured from a "Varsity man." It was Noel Hill's own suggestion that Sheba should share her brother's studies, and as the school hours clashed somewhat, he arranged to take her in the morning for a couple of hours, and Hex and any of his school-fellows who could manage it were to meet at the Parsonage in the evening twice a week.

Sheba's first lesson was as much a source of wonder to her teacher as to herself. They sat in the verandah—it being cooler than the house, and he commenced to take her miscellaneous store of information to pieces, bit by bit, like the mechanism of a clock. Some of it surprised him very much, but on the other hand her ignorance of most ordinary subjects was quite as singular. "I have only learnt what I liked," Sheba affirmed. "Mother and I have had terrible battles, but she always had to give in."

Then Noel Hill gently, but firmly, gave her to understand that if he was to be teacher and she pupil, he must exact strict obedience to his directions, and proceeded to explain that, dry and uninteresting as rules of grammar were, it was impossible to speak or write correctly and fluently without mastering their intricacies.

"You say you love writing themes," he went on gravely. "But you cannot acquire style or elegance or form of expression without studying the art of composing sentences in different ways. For instance, some of those you have shown me are full of tautology, and you construct your sentences with unvarying sameness. You have a very vivid imagination. That is a natural gift, but you must learn to utilize it and expend its forces more equally if you really wish to derive any good from it."

"What good could I derive?" asked Sheba humbly.

"A great deal," he said. "You may become a writer or a poet. I am sure you have written poetry, have you not?"

"Yes," she said, blushing crimson and dropping her eyes with sudden shyness.

"Oh," said Noel Hill smiling, "I am not going to ask you to show it me. I know how jealously we prize those first fledglings of imagination, and how we dread any critical eye beholding them."

I am merely stating what I think you are capable of doing and telling you the best way of doing it."

"I should love to write," said Sheba, her great liquid eyes flashing up to her teacher's face. "Have women ever written books—really clever books that people care to read?"

"I should think so," laughed the young man. "Mrs. Browning and Mrs. Hemans are great poets, especially the former. Eliza Cook is another. There are more woman authors in England than I can name: Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Miss Muloch, besides the new school of sensational literature, which originates from a feminine source and will have hosts of imitators. You see there is a chance for you, Miss Sheba. But to be a great writer you not only want a brilliant imagination and sound judgment, but a perfect literary style. Combine those forces and you may assure yourself of success and fame; separate them, rely merely on the brilliance and ease, not the care and finish, and you will obtain, perhaps, a *succès d'estime*, but nothing lasting or satisfactory; the summer season of the moth and the butterfly, no more.

Sheba drew a deep breath. "I will take your advice," she said, "and do exactly what you wish."

"Ah," he said, "now we shall get on. Just let us classify our studies, fix the days for each, and then we will see what progress you make. I am a great stickler for order and method. One thing at a time and that thoroughly. You have waded through your Latin grammar I see; but what about Greek? Do you really wish to learn Greek?"

"If you please," Sheba said timidly. "Is it a thing girls usually learn?"

"I believe not," he said. "But then you are not a 'usual' little girl. Well, if you are so anxious we will give three mornings a week to Greek; the other three to Latin and English. What do you say?"

"It will be lovely," she answered, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"Now, then, as that is settled, give me the Latin grammar."

The time sped almost too quickly for Sheba. What a delightful teacher this was, and how in a few words he cleared away difficulties that had haunted her young brain for years.

The lesson was nearly over when the "click" of the gate latch made her look up. To her great surprise she saw Bessie Saxton in all the glories of a pale pink cotton, and hat of a shape and style utterly unknown to Sheba's Arcadian eyes, advancing towards the verandah.

The young lady came forward looking, so Sheba thought, far prettier even than on the previous evening. Noel Hill rose and bowed; it never entered Sheba's head that she ought to introduce him to her visitor.

"Well," asked Bessie, "have you finished your lessons? Aunt sent me round to ask you to come back with me and spend the evening. Will you?"

"I should like to," said Sheba, "but," and she looked doubtfully at Noel Hill, "my lessons have to be prepared. I mustn't neglect them."

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you could do them before you go with your—friend." He looked inquiringly at Bessie.

She blushed and smiled and tossed her pretty fair head. "My name," she said, "is Saxton. We have come to live at the Crow's Nest. I hope you will call to see us. It is terribly lonely, and after England—"

"You have just come from England then," he said, "so have I. The life here is a great contrast." He drew a chair forward. "Won't you sit down?" he said.

Sheba looked on wonderingly, and with a reluctant admiration for the quite "grown up" manners of Miss Saxton. She leant languidly back in her chair, and fanned herself with her broad-brimmed hat. She looked up at Noel Hill's face, and dropped her eyes and smiled and blushed in a way altogether puzzling to Sheba's uninitiated mind, innocent as yet of the faintest meaning of the word "flirtation." "I think," she interposed somewhat brusquely, "I will go and ask mamma what to do about going back with you."

"Yes, do," said Bessie languidly. "And I hope you can give me some lunch, for I'm half dead after this long walk."

"There's only cold beef," said Sheba, "and stewed fruit and rice. You must put up with that instead of the 'dozen courses' you would get in England."

"What an odd child that is," said Miss Saxton, as the girl disappeared through the open hall door. "I don't envy you your task of instructing her, Mr. Hill."

"Don't you?" he said smiling. "She is very clever and very quick. I am rather inclined to be proud of my pupil."

"I expect," she said critically, "it is superficial cleverness. Those quick children are almost always shallow."

"Well," said Noel Hill gravely, "time will show. I have my own opinion at present."

He could not help marvelling in his own mind at what period of feminine existence the faculty for disparaging each other's mental or physical advantages developed itself. Young as the new arrival was, she undoubtedly possessed it, and he regarded her with some interest after that remark.

Miss Saxton on her side was busy forming her own opinion of the young man. He was decidedly better-looking than she had imagined, though not quite tall enough or manly enough to satisfy her taste, which leaned to the muscular and "Guy Livingstone" type of manhood. Still, he would do to pass the time

and keep her hand in, for Miss Saxton had determined that her rôle in life was to be *un peu coquette*; not too much, not anything of the sort that was provocative of deadly rivalry and bloodshed, but just *un peu*—the little delicate *nuances* of coquetry that are so captivating and ensnaring, the exact antipodes of Sheba, who was brusque and rough and blundering, and as ugly and wild as a little Shetland pony in its native haunts.

So she leant gracefully back in the wicker chair and glanced ever and anon at Noel Hill from under her long fair lashes, and hoped he would take her for seventeen, and pay her a compliment on her appearance.

But nothing was further from Noel Hill's thoughts. He stood there turning over the leaves of the Latin grammar somewhat absently, and only waiting for Sheba's return to say good-bye.

He had a vague idea that this English girl was tall and lazy and over dressed, and inclined to look down upon his little bush girl, as he called Sheba in his own mind. Further than that he did not concern himself about her presence, being a man to whom feminine society was of very little importance, and who, at present, regarded the sex analytically rather than admiringly.

So the two maintained almost total silence, until presently Sheba burst in upon them with the announcement that her mother would be delighted if Miss Saxton would stay to lunch; "though we always call it dinner," Sheba added with her usual frankness, "and I may go back with you in the afternoon, but not till it gets cooler, so I can do my lessons before I go."

"Well, now I must say good morning," Noel Hill interposed. "I am glad," he added as he held Sheba's small brown hand for a moment, "that you are to have a little pleasure. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' you know."

"Oh," said Sheba, "no amount of work would make me dull. I love it too much."

"Still," said her preceptor gravely, "all excesses are bad; so I am going to look after you in more ways than one."

Then he shook hands with Miss Saxton and went away.

The two girls stood there and watched him, one critically, the other reverently.

"And what do you think of him?" asked Sheba eagerly, so soon as he was out of earshot.

"Oh," said Miss Saxton superciliously, "he is not bad. But I've not much opinion of curates. However, he'll do to keep my hand in."

"To keep your—hand—in," faltered Sheba extremely bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, you will learn soon enough, my dear," answered Bessie with an airy little laugh. "I don't want to disturb your innocence just yet. Oh, here comes your mother, and I hope it's to say lunch is ready, for I'm starving."

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT TO THE CROW'S NEST.

It was nearly five o'clock when the two girls set out for the Crow's Nest.

The road, though rough and uneven, was sheltered by huge gum trees, which shut it in on either side, and the dense, thick growth of scrub and bush and flowering plants and broom-grass looked almost impenetrable, though Sheba had often plunged into their dense depths and wandered for miles and miles through their trackless maze.

She was telling her new friend some of her experiences and escapes as they walked along, how she had been lost once for a whole day and yet found her own way home again, with nothing to guide her save her own memory of the trees and ravines she had passed.

"Weren't you frightened?" asked Bessie Saxton.

"No; I knew I should be sure to find my way in time. I have often wished I could find the place where I lost myself; I never saw anything so lovely. There was a waterfall quite two hundred feet, and beyond it a valley opened out, all green grass and wild flowers, and shut in by low, rocky hills. It was so lovely and so silent—only just the birds singing and the hum of the insects—I don't think any one had ever been there before."

"We might try and find it and have a picnic there," suggested Bessie. "Some one told me on the voyage that picnics were the only form of festivity you Australians know."

Miss Saxton said "you Australians" as though she meant "you aborigines."

"A picnic!" Sheba laughed scornfully. "It is quite fifteen miles away," she said. "And there's no road. I suppose you'd scarcely care to tramp through the bush all that way, and drag provision baskets with you?"

"No," said Bessie dubiously, "that would hardly do. But I suppose there are other places more accessible. I mean to get up a picnic if I can. Are there any men about besides Noel Hill?"

"Is it English manners to call men by their Christian names almost as soon as you know them?" asked Sheba.

"Oh, I always do it; I got into the way at school. We were rather a go-ahead lot there, and it's so stupid to say 'Mr.' Besides, he's quite young. What does it matter? This is the last place in the world where I should expect to find forms and ceremonies. But you haven't answered my question."

"There are no other men," said Sheba. "There are plenty of boys, and you have sisters younger than yourself, so they'd get on very well."

"What age are the boys?" asked Bessie.

"Let me see—Ted Sanderson, he's fifteen; Felix Short, fourteen; Bobby Burton, twelve; Hex, my brother, eleven—they're the best of the boys hereabout. The others are a vulgar lot. Ted's the best of them all. I have just promised to be his sweetheart."

"What!" Bessie Saxton stopped in the road, and stared in astonishment at her companion.

"Did you never hear of 'sweethearts?' Oh, it's a great institution here. I've had a great many. By-the-by, that just reminds me he will be expecting me in the wilderness this afternoon. He was to bring me some scent. They always bring me presents. I suppose that's what sweethearts are for!"

"You really," exclaimed Bessie, moving on again, "are *the* oddest child! The idea of your having a sweetheart. Does he think you're pretty?"

"Oh, no," laughed Sheba, shaking back her mane of hair. "No one with eyes in their head would think that. It's just an idea of his, that's all. You see there were no other girls about old enough to be sweethearts, so he chose me."

"And what," asked Bessie curiously, "do you do?"

"Well, we meet, and sometimes we go for walks together—and—well, then he brings me presents, as I told you. I think that's all."

"No spooning?" inquired Bessie, regarding her small friend with renewed interest.

"What's that? I never heard of such a thing," answered Sheba in astonishment.

"Didn't you? Then Australian sweethearts must be very different to those in other countries. Does he want to kiss you?"

"Oh, yes, he always wants to do that," said Sheba frankly. "I think it's the worst part of the business myself, but boys are so funny! I daresay," she added, looking at her companion, "that Ted will want to be your sweetheart as soon as he knows you."

Miss Saxton tossed her fair head with contempt. "As if," she said superciliously, "I should look at a boy of fifteen!"

"But you are only fifteen yourself," said Sheba.

"Oh, yes, but then girls are grown up much sooner than boys. Why, I might marry at sixteen, but fancy a *husband* of sixteen! The law wouldn't permit it."

"Marry," faltered Sheba. "Oh, but that has nothing to do with sweethearts."

"You little innocent. It generally begins with having a sweetheart. I really must lend you a novel or two just to enlighten you."

"Not the one about the woman who pushed her husband down the well, please," said Sheba. "I shouldn't like to fancy a woman doing such a wicked thing; and when I read of people I

always seem to know them, and I get quite fond of them sometimes."

"Do you think, then, that women never do wicked things?" asked her Mentor.

"I don't know," said Sheba; "I am rather ignorant about them. But I should like to fancy they were good and kind, and wise and loving, and that the world was the better for having them."

"Well, the longer you live the more you will find out your mistake," said the young cynic of fifteen. "There are some very queer women in the world, I can tell you. We had a French girl at our school, and she used to tell us some nice stories about them, even about her own mother, who thought she was as innocent as a baby, and didn't know what—oh, but I mustn't enlighten you too much; your time will come. But women are not angels, though of course they try to make men believe so, that is to say until they've hooked a husband. *Après*——."

She made a little airy gesture suitable to the rôle of "*un peu coquette*": a little intangible shrug and wave of the hand studied from "the life," as artists say—the life being represented by Mdle. Hélène de Latour, her former schoolfellow.

Sheba looked at her with dissatisfaction, her brows drawn in a somewhat stern line, her great eyes puzzled and full of doubt.

"So," she said at last, "that is what girls learn at school. I'm glad I never went to one."

"It will be all the same as if you had, a few years hence," said Bessie disdainfully. "You needn't pretend to be so prudish. The moment a girl is grown up and goes into the world she learns how much more evil there is in it than good. And, after all, naughty people are much more amusing than good ones. There was a woman on the steamer coming out—well, she wasn't particularly pretty, and she had been divorced *twice*, and yet all the men were round her like bees after honey, and the quiet ones never had an admirer at all. It is really much better to be *chic* than proper. I mean to be!"

Fortunately these sayings were Greek to Sheba, whose only knowledge of such a word as "divorce" came from the Bible, and to whom marriage seemed a far-off and sacred mystery about which she had not yet begun to speculate. But she felt considerably astonished at Bessie Saxton's worldly knowledge and wisdom, and for the rest of the walk listened in bewildered silence to her stream of information and wondered if the other girls would be like her.

They reached the Crow's Nest at last and were greeted by hilarious shouts from the remaining Misses Saxton, who were watching for their arrival very impatiently.

Bessie treated them with the serene dignity of an elder sister, but Sheba was delighted with the merry girl-faces, the untidy

frocks and torn hats, which seemed at once to draw her towards them in a bond of sympathy.

They were very friendly, these three younger Saxtons. Floy was a wild hoyden just a year older than Sheba; Bee was twelve, and Nera a perfect picture of lovely childish, dimpled ten.

After greetings had been exchanged, they marched Sheba off to be introduced to "Aunt Allison," a tall, slender, dove-eyed woman with the sweetest face Sheba had ever seen, and the kindest manner. She put the shy awkward girl at her ease at once, and then they all had tea out in the verandah—a tea which to Sheba's eyes was a fairy-like meal, so daintily was it set out with flowers and fruits, and silver and china, and delicious cakes and wonderful hot scones, the work of John Chinaman, who Miss Saxton declared was a marvel in the way of cooks.

Sheba noticed that Bessie was very silent and subdued in her aunt's presence. She neither indulged in her French *minaude-ries* nor her English cynicism. But she did not show herself in an altogether amiable light, and none of her sisters seemed very fond of her. Directly tea was over she carried Sheba off to see her dresses, greatly to the disgust of the younger ones, who wanted her to come into the garden. Unhappily the dresses did not interest Sheba; in fact, their fine material and elaborate style only represented to her the inconvenience of wearing them and behaving in a manner suitable to their importance.

"I'd never wear anything but cottons and brown holland if I could help it," she said, as Bessie expatiated on the beauties of a delicate pink silk, not yet made up, but which she was reserving for some festivity in Sydney.

"No wonder, then, you look such a guy," exclaimed Bessie petulantly. Her temper was ruffled by Sheba's exasperating non-appreciativeness. After taking out all these treasures of millinery and dazzling her visitor's eyes with delicate fabrics and exquisite shades of colour, to be told that cotton and brown holland were preferable! Sheba would never be *chic*.

"Do I look a guy?" asked Sheba with perfect equanimity.

The truth did not hurt her at all. She had heard that she was ugly ever since she could remember. It was no news to her.

She turned to the glass on the toilet table and surveyed herself critically.

What a contrast indeed to Bessie, with her fair wavy hair and her rose-leaf complexion, and her tall graceful figure that had none of the angularity and sharpness of girlhood, but was so rounded, and had such exquisite lines and curves. "Yes," she said with a sigh, "I am hideous; there's no denying it. But wishing won't make me any better, and as I told mother once if God had wanted me to be pretty, He would have made me so. I certainly can't help it."

"Did you really tell her that?" asked Bessie, laughing suddenly. "What fun! Whatever did she say?"

"I don't think she said anything," answered Sheba. "But she left off worrying for a time. I suppose," she went on doubtfully, as she looked from her own reflection to that of her friend, "I suppose I couldn't improve myself, could I? My hair, now—yours is quite different. Those loose waves on your forehead are so pretty."

"Oh, I could soon do yours like that, but I don't know if it would suit you," said Bessie doubtfully.

"But doesn't yours *grow* like it?" demanded Sheba in surprise.

"Bless your heart, no! It's done with crimping pins. It's all the fashion in England. Just sit down a minute and I'll show you the way."

Sheba obeyed in some wonderment. Her friend took up a comb from the toilet table and separated a small portion of the front hair from the remainder; then brushed the great curling, heavy mass back, plaited it loosely in a tail and tied it with a piece of ribbon.

"Now," she explained, "this bit of hair I am going to cut short and wave, it will then just fall a little over your forehead, and soften the outline of your face. It will do away with that strained, tight look of your hair. It doesn't suit you at all, taken off your face."

"That's what I always tell mother," said Sheba; "but she will do it her way."

"Well, you ask her if this isn't an improvement," said Bessie triumphantly, as snip, snip went the scissors, and the heavy locks fell into Sheba's lap. The next moment she gave a cry of pain. "Oh, you mustn't mind being hurt for a little while," said Bessie laughing. "I have to keep my pins in all night, but your hair has a natural curl at the end and I think it will fall prettily almost by itself. There," she added triumphantly, as she gave the pin a final twist, "now you can put on your hat and we'll go into the garden. In about half-an-hour I'll take the pins out and you'll see how different you look! And you must really get your mother to buy you a new hat. There are some very pretty shapes in just now. That one of yours would make Venus herself look hideous."

"I don't know how it is," said Sheba ruefully, "but mamma always *does* get me such ugly things. I quite dread a new hat or a new dress. Last winter I had one all red and yellow checks; it was dreadful. I loathed the sight of it! and I have to wear them. If she'd only let me choose my own colours—but she won't."

"Well, perhaps we'll mend her of that," said Bessie. "If you only begin to take an interest in your dress and find out what

suits you it's wonderful how you can improve yourself. I've known girls quite as ugly as you look almost nice, just because the colours and styles of their clothes suited them. Now let's go out in the garden. I think papa has come home, and those young ones are making such a row."

CHAPTER XII.

ANTICIPATIONS.

How Sheba enjoyed that evening and how merry they all were in the great wild garden.

If the girl had been at a disadvantage in Bessie's dainty chamber with those stores of finery compelling her unwilling attention, she certainly made up for it now. So fleet of foot, so quick of action, so joyous of laugh and jest, so forbearing to the elder girl's vaunted superiority, so gentle and sympathetic with little Nora who was used to being snubbed and never considered in any way.

Then to see her swing herself up a tree and flit from branch to branch as rapidly and easily as a squirrel, it was a marvel to the English girls, used only to prim walks in London parks, and the alternate confinement of nursery and schoolrooms. When they found out she could play cricket they all wanted to learn, except of course the dignified Bessie, and as Nora had a ball, Sheba soon extemporized a bat for them out of a broken paling, and gave them their first lesson, winding up with "rounders," which to judge from the screams and shouts of laughter that resounded on all sides, was received with immense favour.

Mr. Saxton and his sister, attracted by the noise, came out at last to watch them.

"It is a treat to see a girl run like that," exclaimed Bessie's father, as he stood beside his eldest daughter. "Why don't you join them?" he added, as he glanced at that dignified young lady in her spotless gown and irreproachable hat.

"Oh," she exclaimed contemptuously, "I don't like tom-boy games."

"Sheba is not a tom-boy," said Mr. Saxton; "she is a perfectly natural specimen of girlhood. And she is very clever too. I wish there were more girls like her. They are too artificial and too much hampered by conventionality in the old country. Sheba is as different from the typical English girl, as light from darkness."

"Well, I wouldn't exchange places with her," said Bessie superciliously. "She is not a bad little thing, but so dreadfully old-fashioned, and then her looks——"

Mr. Saxton laughed. "Read the story of the ugly duckling," he said, "and never decide hastily of the looks of any one of Sheba's type."

"You are right," said Aunt Allison gently. "With such eyes and hair a girl would never be ugly. Look at her now that she has a colour."

At this moment Sheba came up to them; her hat was off, she had long ago discarded the crimping pins, and the short loose hair fell in a soft curling mass about her brows. Her cheeks had the loveliest carmine flush, and her great dark eyes were lustrous and humid with excitement.

For one moment as Bessie Saxton looked at her the sharpness of jealousy stabbed her heart. She saw in the girl possibilities she had never dreamed of, and before which her fair regular features, and carefully-arranged hair, looked commonplace and insignificant.

In Sheba was a glow as of hidden fire, passion, expression, feeling, genius. All held their abiding place in that girlish heart and all might lend their aid in the future to dower her with something far beyond the mere feminine prettiness which Bessie had estimated so highly.

"How hot you look," she said pettishly. "And what a tom-boy you are. How can you find any pleasure in romping like that?"

Sheba looked at the girl with openly expressed surprise. "Romping—" she said; "I suppose it did look rather wild, but they liked it."

"And so I should hope, did you," said Mr. Saxton smiling.

"Yes," she answered, but looking troubled as she saw Bessie's clouded face and averted eyes, "I like a game now and then, and it is a treat to me to have girls to play with. I have always had boys, you know, before to-night."

"I don't think they have done you much harm," said Mr. Saxton. "And what a famous runner you are; you skim over the ground like a bird."

She blushed and her eyes grew radiant. Praise was as the very breath of life to Sheba, who had been only used to hearing herself called awkward, and neglectful, and ugly, and stupid ever since she could remember.

"I am glad," she said softly, "that you don't think the worse of me because I can run and climb and play cricket. Hex taught me. You see," she said apologetically, "I had not the advantages of your daughters. I have no sisters."

"I don't know," said Mr. Saxton, glancing from Bessie's clouded face to Floy's saucy one, "that you are any the worse for that. However," he added laughing, "we are quite ready to adopt you into our midst, and I see you have made yourself welcome very soon."

Again Sheba flushed and paled and the tears came thronging to her eyes. It was so strange, so unusual, to hear any one speak to her like this. She could scarcely credit it. Before she could

command herself sufficiently to reply, Aunt Allison approached and took her hand, smiling kindly down at her disturbed face.

"I think," she said, "it is my turn now to have a little talk with you. Come and walk round the garden with me."

Sheba looked gratefully at the kind sweet face. She never could have told in that, or any future time, how it was that Aunt Allison found her way straight to her heart. How she seemed to know instinctively the troubles and perplexities which weighted it so heavily. She only knew that she seemed to breathe a new atmosphere of which love and consideration were component parts, and that never in all her life—which seemed long enough for retrospection and regrets—had she felt so richly and purely happy as on this night.

The girls were enchanted with her. Mr. Saxton had taken a fancy to her from the first. Aunt Allison seemed like that "ideal" mother of whom she had dreamt in her hours of solitude. Bessie—well, perhaps there was an element of disappointment about Bessie. She was not altogether what Sheba's fervid imagination had pictured, still she was the ideal girlhood, fair, graceful, fascinating, accomplished; a study full of complex interest, though with lurking shadows in the background that might fade or develop as chance should determine.

But the evening came to an end, and Hex made his appearance to bring his sister home, and was introduced to the family of Saxtons, and comported himself in the shy and bashful fashion peculiar to boys of his age, who look on girls as natural enemies, to be avoided carefully when possible. Sheba's leave-taking was fervent and regretful. She felt she liked them all, but if any one had asked her to whom her heart specially inclined, and whose words and face haunted her dreams that night, she would have said Aunt Allison.

Days and weeks drifted by in a very pleasant and happy monotony, after that visit to the Crow's Nest.

Mrs. Ormatroyd was graciously pleased to approve of that alteration in Sheba's hair; and as Bessie proved correct, and the short loose locks did curl naturally, Sheba was saved the tortures of crimping pins or curl papers, such as that young lady herself underwent nightly.

Noel Hill came with unfailing regularity, and Sheba studied and learnt with an ardour that surprised him, much as he had expected from the girl.

This change in her life, this widening circle of ideas and associations, were gradually benefiting Sheba both mentally and physically. Her eyes lost their pathos and yearning and grew soft and tender; her face lost its constant expression of rebellion and discontent, and became richer in colour and outline. She still lost herself in dreams, even more vivid and passionate than of yore, but they were dreams with a purpose and an end. She amazed her mother by becoming submissive and obedient, and

almost neglecting her "tom-boy" pastimes, save and except that one beloved weakness for tree-climbing to which she still clung. Hardly a day passed without her going to the Crow's Nest, or some one from there coming over to her, and the friendship between Bessie Saxton and herself became more pronounced as time went on.

Perhaps the only individuals who suffered from the change in Sheba were her sweethearts; she utterly neglected them, and even the favoured Ted Sanderson was rarely permitted to have an interview. There were more books at the Crow's Nest than all the boys' joint efforts could have collected, and under Aunt Allison's judicious superintendence Sheba feasted on their treasures to her heart's content. There were no novels among them, and when Bessie offered her one now and then, surreptitiously procured by herself, she always refused to read it. "Your aunt says I had better not," was her invariable rejoinder, and she was firm in adhering to that resolve, despite her friend's ridicule.

When the fiercest heat of the summer had passed, that idea of the "picnic" was again mooted and received with general favour. The subject of conveyances was long under discussion, as carriages of any description were luxuries unknown, but at last it was settled by no less a person than John Chinaman, who stated he had a friend who possessed a large dray and two fine strong horses, and that the said friend would be quite willing to place them at the disposal of the party—for a consideration.

The "consideration" not being altogether too exorbitant, it was resolved to accept the vehicle, and an awning was rigged up as a protection from sun or rain, and seats of all kinds, from bamboo chairs to empty boxes, were arranged for the convenience of the passengers. John Chinaman himself went as guide, for he had expressed himself as being intimately acquainted with a "muchee fine picnic place," where was "muchee fine water—muchee nice sea," and where they could feast and roam about to their heart's content.

No one of the party knew anything at all about the place, so excitement and speculation were rife as to its beauties and accessibility.

As for Sheba she had never in the whole course of her life experienced such an amount of expectation and delight as when the eventful day arrived, ushered in by serene skies and glorious sunshine, though already the year was waning and the leaves beginning to fall.

She had never been to a picnic before. Perhaps if she had her anticipations would have been less glorified. She was up at six o'clock and took her cold bath, and had a run round the garden with Billy, and fed the fowls and the pigeons, and then came back to the house with a glow in her cheeks and a light in her eyes that made her look almost pretty.

Then, after breakfast, she attired herself in a clean brown-holland frock which did, for a wonder, reach her ankles, and put on a brown straw hat which Bessie had given her, declaring it did not suit herself. It certainly suited Sheba, and having discovered a late half-blown crimson rose in the garden she fastened it at her throat, and then dashed off in her usual impetuous fashion into the verandah to look out for the anxiously expected van which was to come for their party at nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROMISE.

"I DECLARE," said Noel Hill, "my little bush-girl looks quite charming. What has she been doing to herself?"

He had just arrived and joined Hex and Sheba in the verandah. Mr. and Mrs. Ormatroyd had not yet put in an appearance. The latter was occupied in walking round the sitting-room, and lifting up various ornaments and books to ascertain whether the servant had dusted underneath them. It was difficult to convince Mrs. Ormatroyd that servants ever did their work properly, and she always liked to convince herself of the truth of their statements to that effect. Sheba had a foolish habit of asking the servant whether she had done so and so, and of believing her when she gave an affirmative response, but Mrs. Ormatroyd was not so rash.

There was still five minutes before the van was due, so she was employing her time in searching for dust—always an exciting occupation to her, and an unfailing resource for leisure moments like the present.

"Do I really look nice?" exclaimed Sheba delightedly, as she shook hands with the young clergyman. "Perhaps it's the hat—it's one of Bessie's, and she *does* have such pretty hats!"

"One of Bessie's," echoed Noel Hill. "Well, it does not look much like Miss Saxton's—too quiet—not enough feathers and things, I should say."

"Oh, here are the boys!" cried Sheba, ignoring the subject of Bessie's feathers; "three of them. Now we're all here, so I hope the van won't be late."

"Who is to drive?" inquired Noel Hill, as Hex dashed down to the gate to welcome his friends.

"Oh, John Chinaman's friend, I believe. Isn't it fun—not one of us know where we're going?"

"Immensely exciting," said Noel Hill. "Let us hope there will be no bushrangers about."

"Bushrangers!" echoed Sheba with contempt. "Why, there isn't such a thing in this district; they keep to the region of the goldfields and mail-carts. They wouldn't touch us even if we saw any."

"I am not so sure of that!" said Noel Hill. "I came out here with distinct impressions of bushrangers, and I mean to stick to them."

"You had impressions of kangaroos and wallabies also," said Sheba with fine scorn. "You thought they were bloodthirsty and terrible animals. What of them now?"

"Well," he said gravely, "I confess to being mistaken in the kangaroo; he is not so bloodthirsty as—the mosquito."

Sheba laughed. "They always like new arrivals," she said. "But I am sure I heard wheels. Oh, yes; there's the van. Doesn't it look nice!"

Off she dashed, and was out of the gate in a moment and exchanging greetings with the occupants of the vehicle; the younger members of the party being as excited as herself.

"You nice little brown girl," cried Floy. "You really look quite pretty—doesn't she, auntie?"

Aunt Allison smiled kindly at the wistful face turned towards her. "You have taken my advice, I see," she said. "I am glad of it. The result is very satisfactory."

"Come and sit next me, Sheba," cried Floy. "Here, I've kept my box for you."

Sheba glanced wistfully at Bessie, but that young lady bent forwards and whispered hurriedly, "I want Noel Hill next me."

So the girl mounted the somewhat awkward vehicle, and took the place Floy had reserved for her.

Presently the rest of the party appeared bringing more provision baskets, which had to be packed in by John Chinaman and his friend. Mrs. Ormatroyd secured a bamboo chair close to Aunt Allison; Noel Hill took the seat pointed out to him by Bessie, and Ted Sanderson and Felix Short squeezed themselves in a corner close to Sheba and Floy. Then crack went the whip. The horses—fine, strong animals, with bells jingling at their harness—started off, and Noel Hill, glancing at Sheba's face of rapt delight, thought in his heart, "What gift of God is like that of youth, and the capacity to enjoy all it brings!"

The drive was for four hours over rough and uneven roads, or through tracks of badly-cleared scrub; but the jolting and shaking only seemed to add to the merriment of the party, who, with the solitary exception of Mrs. Ormatroyd, had agreed to set dignity at defiance, and be thoroughly unconventional for once.

Yet, despite jests and anecdotes and laughter, it was with considerable satisfaction that the whole party hailed John Chinaman's announcement, "Here placee picnic—no memble namee—all same, good placee picnic."

Out they all scrambled and off went the young ones like a bevy of wild rabbits, to explore the neighbourhood, while their elders prepared the meal for which they were all quite ready.

The distant sound of falling water had attracted Sheba, and she

tried to persuade Bessie to accompany her in her search for the waterfall, but that young lady declined, having already had some experience of Sheba's reckless scrambles, and the perils and inconveniences thereof. Seeing the other youngsters scattered about in all directions, Sheba started off for the waterfall herself. Their present situation was in the heart of a little valley, beautifully cool and sheltered. Not half a mile off, the great ocean broke in massive billows on the rocky coast, but it was quite shut out from sight, and Sheba had only the Chinaman's word for its proximity. She flew on with her usual light and rapid step, startling a kangaroo rat from its hiding place, and awaking the untoward mirth of a laughing jackass.

The thunder of the falling water grew more and more distinct, and the approach to it more and more difficult, but Sheba pushed bravely on through the mass of wild flowers, creepers and wattle that opposed her steps. At last she found herself below what seemed a gigantic rift in the earth, and through this the waters of some great and unknown river were rushing, only to leap over a precipice that faced where she stood, and in one magnificent cascade of seething foam hurl themselves down on the broken rocks below.

For a moment the girl held her breath and stood there awed and amazed. Accustomed as she was to the wild grandeur and scenic marvels of this marvellous land, it seemed to her that nothing so magnificent had ever yet greeted her eyes.

The place was intensely lonely save for that low thunder roar of the falling water. All the foliage was green and gold and amber tinted; the low rocky hills spread seawards, crowned with trees, and far above gleamed blue depths of sky, and snowy piles of clouds that roofed the valley.

Sheba did not move; she simply stood there gazing at the scene and wondering at that divine freshness and beauty, set like God's seal upon primeval lands, which seem to hallow all spots undesecrated by foot of man.

There are links between nature and humanity which civilization has done its best to destroy; but what breath of purity or inspiration lives in towns worthy to compare with the boundless space, the freedom, air and grandeur of nature's widespread territories where the savage holds his heritage, and the forest creatures roam unharmed?

How long Sheba might have stood there in that rapt and wondering dream, it is hard to say; but something disturbed her at last and made her start almost in terror, so strange and unexpected a sound it was.

From the bushes a little to her right there issued a low faint moan, like some plaint of pain, and the girl, startled, yet faintly curious, moved hurriedly towards the spot.

Not a dozen yards from where she stood, and lying face downwards on the grass, was stretched the figure of a man. At first

Sheba thought he must be asleep, but a second moan startled that fancy into something of fear, and she bent over the prostrate form and tried to see the hidden face. Then suddenly her lips paled and she turned cold and sick. There was blood upon the bright hair, so close to her down-bent face, and involuntarily she tried to raise the man's head and turn him on his side. At her touch, and as if recognizing her weak endeavour, he made an effort also, but he groaned involuntarily, and she saw the death-like whiteness of his face turn ashy grey. She laid him gently down and flew to the water and brought some back in her hat, with which she sprinkled his face and bathed the wound on his temple. It was not very deep, but it bled profusely, and Sheba, having no knowledge of wounds, grew terribly alarmed at sight of that flowing stream.

It suddenly occurred to her that in books, wounds were always bandaged, so she took out her handkerchief and tried to bind it round the head of the unconscious man. It was far too small to go round it. In despair she tucked up her frock, and seizing her linen petticoat, tore a long strip off it, and first dipping the handkerchief in water, laid it on the wound and proceeded to bind it tightly with the strip of soft linen. Just as she had accomplished this, the wounded man opened his eyes. They were full of wonder and almost, she thought, of alarm.

"Are you better?" she asked.

His face grew very white; he made an effort to rise, supporting himself on one elbow.

"Yes," he said; "I am better. Did you—did you find me here?"

"Yes," said Sheba, looking at him with mingled admiration and compassion. "Your head was bleeding dreadfully. Did you fall down the precipice?"

"I—I suppose so," he said; but she noticed that the colour flushed his bronzed face and that his eyes flashed wrathfully. "I am better now," he added, as he staggered to his feet and leant against the tall gum tree beside which Sheba had discovered him. He looked at her critically for the first time. "How on earth did you find your way here?" he asked.

"I am here for a picnic," said Sheba. "The rest of us are over there," and she nodded in the direction of the gully through which she had come.

A look of alarm crossed his face. He glanced searchingly at Sheba. "Will they come here?" he asked. "I—you will think it strange—but I don't wish to be seen by anybody—any strangers——"

"Oh!" said Sheba composedly, "I don't think they will find this place very easily. I had great difficulty myself."

"But won't they come to look for you?" he asked.

"I expect not. They are to 'coo-ee' when dinner is ready. They know I am sure to find my way back."

"You are a brave little girl," he said; "and I owe you a debt of gratitude for coming to my rescue. I wonder you weren't frightened to touch me."

"You did look very bad," said Sheba, "and I hate the sight of blood, but I couldn't see you bleeding to death without doing something to help you."

"I wonder," he said bitterly, "if I should have bled—to death? Probably not. The desired never happens. Well, now I should like to know if you can be trusted to keep a secret? Your sex and your age are against you. What do you say?"

"I know I could," said Sheba, flushing hotly, but looking straight at him with her great sombre eyes.

"May I trust you, then?" he said gently. "Tell none of your party about me, or this accident. I have reasons—strong reasons—for wishing no one to know of it. Will you promise me?"

"Yes," said the girl simply.

She made neither comment nor remonstrance, and the fact surprised him. He had expected a fire of questions and expressions of curiosity. He looked searchingly at her with his deep blue eyes, and she met the gaze unflinchingly.

"I believe you will keep your word," he said.

The colour had faded from his face again, he looked faint and worn.

"Can I do anything more for you?" asked Sheba. "You seem so weak. Have you no friend—no one to take care of you?"

A strangely bitter smile crossed his lips.

"No," he said; "and I want none. I don't believe in—friends."

His eyes glanced round and suddenly darkened with an ominous flash. They had caught sight of something which had escaped Sheba's notice. At the same moment a loud prolonged "coo-ee" came to their ears, and Sheba started involuntarily.

"They are calling me," she said. "I must go. I—I do hope you are better. How do you mean to get out of here?"

"Oh, I am all right," he said, almost eagerly. "I know a friendly black fellow who has a hut not far off. I can easily walk there. Now you had better be off to your friends or they will be anxious. Stay—what is your name? We are not likely ever to meet again, still I should like to know."

"My name," she said slowly, "is Sheba."

He looked at her a moment. "An uncommon name," he said; "but I fancy you are an uncommon child. Sheba—I will not forget. Well, good-bye. I hope I don't seem ungracious, but I don't wish your party to catch sight of me."

He held out his hand, and Sheba gave him hers. The blue eyes and the brown eyes met in a long serious gaze. Then he bent and touched her hand with his lips, while the blood flushed in a hot tide to her face at the grave and courteous salute.

"Remember your promise," he said softly.

She only bent her head. She could not speak—so strange a flood of emotion swept through her heart, and set its pulses leaping with the gravity and importance of a granted trust. Like one in a dream she turned and moved slowly away and the tall trees shut her out from sight. The man watched until the slight young figure was no longer visible, then his eyes turned again to that dark spot in the grass which had previously attracted his notice, and feebly and with effort he moved towards it.

Then he stooped and picked up from the tangled grasses a small shining tube. He looked at the glittering barrel—the discharged chambers, and a dark frown gathered on his brow.

"So it was—her—work," he muttered. "Well, it only needed this to end everything completely and for ever. I have been a fool, and my folly has almost cost me my life. But, thank God, it has cured me. As Heaven hears me, I swear never to love or trust woman from this hour!"

He looked up at the blue sky, canopied with serene indifference, this one small space of earth that had witnessed a tragedy of crime. The look in his face was terrible in its white menace and hatred of what he had forsworn. He placed the revolver in his belt, and staggered with feeble and uncertain steps towards the water's edge.

"Good God!" he groaned. "How shall I ever find strength to get to the hut?"

He bent over the clear rushing stream, and drank eagerly, and laved his face in its cool depths.

The draught seemed to revive him. He lifted his head and shook the bright drops from his hair. Then walking giddily and with effort he disappeared into the dark belt of scrub beyond the valley.

CHAPTER XIV.

"OH—WONDER OF THE SEA!"

THE picnic party were all seated on the grass, on which the cloth had been spread and the various good things laid out, when Sheba at last came in sight.

She was panting and breathless—her clean neat frock was wet with the water that had dripped from her hat while she was carrying it to the wounded man, and in her rapid passage through the bush she had stained it against the rough bark of the trees, and the tangled masses of flowers and ferns amidst which she had fallen more than once. Her hat was still wet, and she held it in her hand; her hair, which had come unplaited, streamed about her in wild confusion.

"Good gracious, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormatroyd, "where

have you been to get into such a state? Why, you're all wet! Have you fallen in a creek?"

"No," said Sheba, "it's only my hat."

She tossed it down as she spoke, and smoothed her hair back from her flushed face. Bessie Saxton laughed outright.

"You do look a sight," she exclaimed. "I thought your tidy fit wouldn't last long. Did you find your waterfall?"

Sheba grew white and red by turns. All eyes were fixed on her, and she naturally exaggerated the disorder of her appearance. Her self-possession left her. She could not speak; her heart began to beat violently, and tears, that in all cases of strong emotion were dangerously near her eyes, began to threaten an advent.

Then suddenly, with the calming effect of a strong, yet gentle partisanship, a voice reached her, and a hand drew her down to a seat on the soft grass.

"Come, Miss Sheba, don't look so miserable. There's no great harm done after all; your dress will be dry before we've finished dinner, and as for the hair—why, if I were a painter I'd ask for nothing better than to make a picture of you—just as you are."

It was Noel Hill who spoke; it was Noel Hill who drew her to his side, and covered her confusion so kindly. Sheba felt her heart swell with gratitude. She could not speak, but the look in her eyes held an eloquence that needed no verbal interpretation, and the young man as he met her glance thought to himself, "How that passionate, enthusiastic soul will suffer some day!"

"You are quite spoiling her, Mr. Hill," said Mrs. Ormatroyd with maternal sternness; "she is really old enough to give up those tiresome ways. She ought to have remained with Bessie and her sisters, not gone rambling off by herself and making herself into such a figure, too!"

But Noel Hill only laughed, and carved the fowls, and gave Sheba some, and filled her glass with lemonade, quite regardless of Mrs. Ormatroyd's grumbling, or Bessie Saxton's somewhat indignant glances.

That young lady had discovered that to be *un peu coquette* with Noel Hill was a waste of time. She had played off innumerable airs and graces, but with no effect. It annoyed her excessively to see him championing Sheba and neglecting herself. True, she might find consolation in the devotion of Ted Sanderson, who seemed to have entirely forsworn his allegiance to his late sweetheart; but then Ted Sanderson was only a boy, and Noel Hill was a man, at least six-and-twenty, a man with a mind and ideas, and one worthy of captivating, and yet he could fuss about an ugly tiresome little chit like Sheba Ormatroyd. No wonder the young lady's serenity was disturbed.

The meal went on gaily enough. People balanced their plates on their knees, and got the cramp by so doing, and spilt the salt

and upset the glasses, and made raids across the extemporized table for bread; and caterpillars crawled over the cloth, and strange insects dropped into the gravy of the pies; and altogether it was as enjoyable and exhilarating as picnics invariably are.

Even Mrs. Ormatroyd grew sociable and almost benevolent under the combined influence of pigeon pie, Bass's ale, and Aunt Allison's proximity.

Mr. Saxton was genial and good-humoured as ever; Mr. Ormatroyd did his best to follow suit; the younger Saxtons and the "boys," to use a comprehensive phrase, were as wild as young colts, and Sheba might have been equally hilarious had it been possible for her to forget her adventure and the promise she had given. But it was not. That pale bronzed face, with its bright hair stained with blood, those grave, deep eyes that had rested so searchingly on hers, haunted her incessantly.

She wondered who the stranger could have been; she felt angry with herself that she had not asked his name. And now he had gone away into those wild bush regions and she might never see him again. Absorbed and silent so she sat there, with the untasted food before her, living over again and yet again those few moments, brief yet momentous, that had linked this unknown life to hers with a memory time could never weaken.

Noel Hill watched her wonderingly. To him Sheba was always an interesting study, and he felt convinced something had happened during her absence, which she was keeping to herself. As he watched her, he saw her put her plate down mechanically and her hand stray to her pocket. It was such a simple and ordinary action that probably he would not have remarked it but for the sudden flush that rose to the girl's face, and the look of disturbance in her eyes as they met his own.

"Mr. Hill," she said hesitatingly, "have you a—a spare handkerchief you could lend me?"

He immediately searched in his pocket. "I don't often have wo," he said, "but to-day—yes—here is an extra one. I brought t in case of any accident. Have you lost yours?"

Sheba hesitated. "I—I left it in the bush," she said, growing very pale.

Noel Hill noted the hesitation and the pallor. "I was right," he said. "She has met with some adventure. I wonder if she will tell me about it."

But Sheba only put the handkerchief in her pocket, took up her plate and finished her meal in total silence.

After dinner Mr. Saxton suggested they should walk to the sea, which John Chinaman confidently asserted could be reached in half-an-hour, and accordingly they all set off. They skirted the scrub by means of a rough foot track which led them by a somewhat steep ascent to the first ridge of hills.

All around them was the dense luxuriance of forest foliage in vivid shades of crimson and green, the glow of berries, the fluttering wings of gorgeous butterflies, the whirr of the locusts as they flitted through the brushwood—things new and strange to Noel Hill and the English girls, but familiar as her daily life to Sheba.

Gradually the soil grew rocky and uneven, the tall gum trees gave place to yellow wattle and short spiky herbage. The air grew keen and fresh, and as they reached the hill summit, before them lay a lovely land-locked bay, with the sea blue as turquoise, shining in the sunlight, and rolling in grand, majestic billows that broke along the coast in sheets of foam.

A universal exclamation of delight escaped all lips, so lovely was the surprise after the rough walk and somewhat monotonous scenery of the bush.

The buzz and hum of woodland life had ceased. Nothing broke the stillness save that lulling murmur of the waves as they rose and fell on the white firm sands, which seemed to stretch for miles and miles around.

Noel Hill glanced at Sheba's face; she was standing by his side, her eyes questioning—startled—as the eyes of one who looks on some new glory.

The beauty, and the wonder, and the delight of what she saw held her speechless—for what is new to soul and sense does not lend itself easily to commonplace words; and as she gazed on that boundless, rolling space melting into the blueness of the dim horizon line, she felt an awe of its beauty that seemed to hold her like a spell, and bow her inmost soul in wondering worship.

The boys broke into noisy shouts, and they and the younger Saxtons rushed at headlong speed down the steep hillocks covered with short and prickly furze, that lay between them and the shore itself.

Their elders followed more sedately, but Sheba still stood there, and Noel Hill lingered beside her.

He did not like to disturb her; he knew instinctively what feelings were at work in the childish soul; how the great and thrilling voice of nature was speaking to her in this hour; and he felt it would be almost sacrilege to disturb that rapt and wondering gaze, to call her down from heights his own fancy might not reach, and bid her fashion the dumb and passionate ecstasy of her startled senses into some adjective of praise, such as the others had used.

She lost all count of time, and place, and association.

She had thought the harbour beautiful when she had crossed it once by the ferry steamer; but its fairy islands, and sloping wooded banks, and lines of wharves and stores, seemed commonplace now beside this vast, free, rolling width of waters, kissed by sun and sky—fanned by free, sweet winds—where the sea-birds

rocked themselves on the dancing waves, and the sails of passing ships melted, vision-like, into the golden air.

When at last her trance of wonder was over, she slowly raised both hands, and pressed them to her eyes for a moment. Then dropping them, she turned to Noel Hill as if in no way surprised that he should be by her side.

"I was wondering," she said dreamily, "how God must have felt when he first looked on *that*, and knew it was His work!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENDING OF THE DAY.

THROUGHOUT the rest of that day Sheba remained in the same dreamy, absorbed state. Nothing roused her—nothing really *awoke* her—but she was intensely happy all the same, happier than she had ever been in her life, though she could not possibly have explained why.

When they were all having tea, Bessie Saxton, who was seated near her, asked her, somewhat ill-naturedly, why she had elected to linger behind them with Noel Hill for so long a time. It was not the question, so much as the way it was put, that startled Sheba. She turned her large frank gaze full on her friend.

"Was it long?" she said. "I did not know. I was looking at the sea. I have never seen it before like that—so large, so free, so wonderful!"

"Phooh!" scoffed Bessie, "looking at the sea for half-an-hour—a likely story! It's a good thing you're not a little older."

"Why?" asked Sheba. "There was no harm in that, was there?"

"Really," exclaimed her friend impatiently, "I don't know whether you are only stupid or—innocent. Harm in it? No! who said there was? You are quite right to make use of your opportunities. But you needn't suppose Noel Hill thinks of you as anything but a child, though he does talk to you so much."

She said this in a low, suppressed whisper, for the young clergyman was not very far off. Sheba felt somewhat bewildered.

"I really don't know what you mean!" she said. "You seem cross with me, but I don't remember doing anything to offend you."

"Offend me! you little——. Well, for goodness' sake don't make a fuss. You are always so dreadfully in earnest about everything. I was only chaffing."

"Chaffing?" echoed Sheba, "ah, that is English. I don't know anything about it."

Bessie's pretty mouth curled with contempt.

"Mr. Hill," she said, making room for him beside herself, "I wish you would put a little common sense into my friend's head, besides Latin and Greek. She is always up in the clouds, it seems to me."

"Oh! she has a fair share of sense for her age," said Noel Hill smiling. "You see, Miss Bessie, she has never had your advantages: you are the pattern English young lady; Sheba is simply a little wild bush flower."

"She wouldn't go down in England at all," said Bessie superciliously. "The girls there are all so 'formed,' so *chic*. Sheba would never be *chic*."

"No, I hope not," answered the young clergyman. "If Englishwomen condescend to copy their French neighbours, it is a pity that they only make a study of their bad qualities."

"Bad!" echoed Bessie. "Do you call it bad to be *chic*? Why, it is just *the* one thing that redeems even an ugly woman. I've heard the men on board ship say so over and over again. They used to say they'd tire of pretty faces very soon, but if a woman had spirit—life—dash—*chic*, in fact, she might hold a man as long as she pleased."

"Oh, indeed," said Noel Hill, "and am I to suppose that some half-dozen men on board ship, represent to your mind the opinions of the English nation at large? The men who come out here are not, as a rule, very creditable specimens. Choice has often less to do with a trip to the colonies than—expediency."

"They were gentlemen," said Bessie, colouring a little at the sarcasm she detected in his voice.

"No doubt," he said smiling. "If you had added 'once,' you would probably be more correct. I have known even English gentlemen deteriorate under the influence of bad associates and dissipation. They generally seek a remedy for these evils amidst new scenes and new lands. The search is more frequent than the discovery. But this conversation is too grave for young people, and I see there is a move up yonder. I suppose we must think of starting homewards at last."

He rose and began to collect the tea-cups and plates, which Mrs. Ormatroyd and Aunt Allison were packing into various hampers and baskets.

"There will be a full moon to-night," he said. "The drive home will be delightful."

It was close on sunset. The clouds in the west glowed like burnished brass. There was a faint breeze stirring the tree-tops. Sheba rose slowly to her feet, and gazed somewhat anxiously in the direction of the waterfall.

She wondered how the stranger had fared—whether he had reached the black man's hut—whether she should ever see him again?

Her secret weighed heavily on her mind. She knew the perils of the bush well enough, and he had seemed so weak and helpless, and perhaps he had miles of that rough, wild region to traverse before he could reach shelter.

Well, whether he had done so, or not, she must leave undecided. She had promised to say nothing of her adventure, and she would keep her word.

With a strong effort she threw off her pre-occupation, and endeavoured to help with the "packing up," and to chat and laugh with Bessie and the children.

Shortly before the van was ready, Felix Short came up to her and drew her a little apart from the others.

"I say, Sheba," he whispered, "have you seen how Ted has been going on with the Saxton girl? He's quite thrown you over. You'd better give me a turn now. You owe me something for that book, you know."

"I will return you your book to-morrow," said Sheba with dignity. "And I'm not going to have anything more to say to any of you boys! There! As for sweethearts—I hate the word!"

"Phew-w-w," whistled the boy, as he thrust his hands in his pockets and, stepping a pace or two back, surveyed her with mingled wrath and irony. "Oh, my! Miss Spitfire, don't you just think you can give yourself airs. Hate sweethearts, do you? A likely story! I suppose you think yourself so mighty grand because you've got a grown-up one. Well, I wish you joy of the canting prig, that I do, and——"

He never got to the end of that sentence, for Sheba, suddenly blazing into one of her "rages," lifted her hand and gave him a stinging box on the ears that sent him reeling back. "How dare you!" she cried, panting like a small fury. "You are a rude, ill-natured, hateful boy! Never attempt to speak to me again!"

She swung round on her heel, perfectly white and trembling with passion. The action brought her face to face with Noel Hill and Bessie Saxton.

"Good gracious, Sheba," exclaimed her friend, "whatever is the matter?"

"Felix was impudent, and I boxed his ears," said Sheba. "Oh," she added passionately, "I wish I was a boy, I'd fight him!"

"Upon my word," faltered Bessie, retreating a step or two, "I had no idea you were such a little fury!"

But Noel Hill laughed outright. "Is that—*chic*, Miss Bessie?" he asked. "At least you must allow it is not conventional."

But Sheba's rage, as usual, dissolved into tears, and she tore off in a blind, unreasoning fashion, and once out of sight, threw herself on the ground, sobbing as if her heart would break.

A chorus of "coo-ee's" at last forced her to return, so she crept

slowly back and found every one in the van, and had to face a fusillade of reproaches and questions to which she gave no answer.

"When a day begins well with me, it is sure to end badly," she thought to herself. "I wonder why it is?"

She crept into a corner near Aunt Allison, and as far as possible from the region of Felix Short's withering glances. She only hoped they would all let her alone, forget her very existence. She felt miserable, tired and humiliated. The kindest voice would have jarred on her, the tenderest sympathy only distressed. Fortunately, Mrs. Ormatroyd decided she was in one of her "sulks," so contented herself with scolding at her, and then relapsed into a fatigued and resigned silence, and Noel Hill understood her well enough now to draw attention away from her with all his tact and kindness.

The evening was closing in, the wind seemed full of exhilarating coolness, the sky grew clear and soft, the Southern Cross glittered gem-like above the horizon, while the moon, full and radiant and bright as liquid silver, poured lavish floods of light upon the rough road, and the tall trees, and the far-off shadows of the hills.

Some sense of the beauty, and strangeness, and enchantment of the scene gradually stole upon them all, and hushed the idle chatter and foolish laughter which had jarred on Noel Hill's ears.

It was all new and strange to him, this glory of an Australian night amidst the grandeur and solitude of the bush. The difference between seasons and scenery had never come home to him before as they came home on this night of waning summer, which he could but contrast with the grey skies, and smoky fogs, and cruel chilling winds that were at present the portion of his native land.

"Australia is a favoured place," he said at last.

The remark raised a rapid controversy. Mrs. Ormatroyd dwelt on discomforts and self-denial, failing to see that the force of the one compelled the exercise of the other, and therefore robbed it of any pretensions to virtue.

Mr. Ormatroyd found fault with the legislation and the society; Mr. Saxton with the mosquitoes and paucity of railways; Aunt Allison sighed mildly over domestic difficulties, and Bessie abused everything indiscriminately as being altogether "so different to England!"

Sheba kept silence, her face averted with an expression of childish pain. "As if those trifles mattered," she thought to herself, "when life is so vast and great, and lies all before one!"

For Sheba did not know yet how widely different are the eyes of youth to those of maturer years, and how Time that changes all things, might one day rend her illusions asunder, till she herself should wonder, not that they should ever have existed, but that they should ever have seemed so *real*, and so full of purpose and of hope, to her!

* * * *

In the midst of the controversy she heard Aunt Allison's gentle voice addressing her.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked. "Has the day tired you?"

The girl lifted her face—it was very pale, and the big dark eyes looked intensely mournful.

"It is all so disappointing," she said. "I was thinking how different I felt when I set out this morning."

"That experience," said Miss Saxton gently, "is a very general one, I imagine. We all felt different when we set out. Everything was to come, you know; now it is all over, and has become a memory instead of an anticipation. But," she added, "you seemed to be enjoying yourself—in your way."

"Is my way so very different to the others?" asked Sheba, noting that hesitation in ending the sentence.

"Yes," said Aunt Allison, "quite different. Bessie, you know, enjoys with due regard to her own position as a central figure; she considers her appearance even amidst the wilds of bush scenery. Your mother simply endures under protest. I take my fill of pleasure quietly and with serenity; my brother noisily; your father philosophically. You note the difference; but the fact of enjoyment may underlie it in every instance."

Sheba smiled. "And I," she said. "How do I take it?"

"Oh," said Miss Saxton gently, "that is different altogether. If I said anything at all, I should say too deeply—too enthusiastically. I wish," she added after a short pause, "that you were more of a child. Can't you enjoy without going into the why and wherefore of it all?"

"No," said Sheba gravely. "How can I help it? It is just like what I said to mother when she told me I was so ugly, 'I didn't make myself.' I don't *want* to be like this," she added, her voice low and deeply earnest, "but I have got to be it—just as I must put up with my sallown skin and ugly features. I would rather be like Bessie if I had the chance, but what use is it to wish for impossibilities?"

"None whatever," said Miss Saxton cheerfully. "So if I were you, dear, I wouldn't wish to be like—Bessie."

"She is not fond of me," said Sheba mournfully. "I so hoped she would be, but she is not; she just tolerates me, that is all. I don't understand about dress, or trimmings, or styles, and she thinks me so stupid when I can't remember if her pink gown has more flounces than her white, or the grey is cut with a pointed bodice and the brown with a full one."

"I think," said Aunt Allison smiling, "there are more important things in life to remember than the cut of a bodice, and doubtless Bessie will think so also one day; she likes pretty things and bright colours and she knows they suit her. Now your passion for books and nature are quite as incomprehensible to her, as her millinery tastes are to you."

Sheba was silent. She was too loyal to say that there was something about Bessie Saxton's moral nature which jarred on her more painfully even than her vanity; something not quite straightforward and honest, that dealt with crooked subtleties and airy sophistries, the like of which Sheba's simple, truthful soul had never conceived.

"I hope," continued Miss Saxton presently, as the voices around them burst into renewed laughter and noisy discussion, "that you will be friends, dissimilar as you are. Girls are the better for girls' society. You would do Bessie good I think, and she—well she would never harm you. You have the courage of opinions, young as you are."

"Bessie says it is horrid in a girl to have opinions," said Sheba. "They ought to be soft, yielding, impressionable. I don't feel at all like that."

Miss Saxton laughed softly. "Did Bessie say so? Perhaps she finds you too strong-minded for her taste. When she was at school she was always modelling herself on somebody; some friend of the 'term.' The friendship rarely outlived a term. I sometimes hardly recognized her; she would be quite different at Midsummer to what she had been at Christmas. We all used to laugh at her so; then she would be dreadfully offended—poor Bessie."

She sighed softly and glanced at the subject of discussion, who was talking with extreme vivacity to Noel Hill and Ted Sanderson alternately.

"She seems very happy," said Sheba. "I think," she added suddenly, "she likes Mr. Hill."

"She wants to have lessons from him," said Aunt Allison with an odd little smile; "I don't know why: she hates learning as a rule."

"What sort of lessons?" asked Sheba wonderingly; "Latin and Mathematics?"

"Oh, no—I don't fancy she would go in for Classics or Euclid. English literature and French. He is a very good French scholar."

"He is wonderfully clever," said Sheba enthusiastically. "And so kind. I never thought I should be fortunate enough to have such a teacher."

The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, under cover of the other voices, but now there came a sudden lull. John Chinaman turned round from his seat by the driver and suggested that as the horses had a steep hill to climb, the gentleman and children should get out and have "walkee, walkee."

Sheba sprang up impetuously and soon they were all out of the van, with the exception of Mrs. Ormatroyd, who was too tired to walk, and Miss Saxton, who stayed to keep her company.

Sheba, who was far in advance of the others, found Noel Hill by her side.

"You are evidently not tired," he said, glancing down at the slight agile figure. "Have you enjoyed your day?"

"Yes, and no," said the girl. "It has been different to what I thought. I am sorry," she added with sudden pained humility, "that I lost my temper. But Felix was very rude; he had no right to say what he did, and a boy will never understand you are angry with him unless you box his ears."

"I think," said Noel Hill with a quiet laugh, "that you left Felix Short in no doubt as to *your* feelings. Do you intend to make it up again?"

"No," said Sheba, shaking back her long thick hair with a sudden impatient movement. "I am sick of boys, and I told him I would never have another sweetheart, and I mean to keep my word."

"Perhaps you are right," said Noel Hill. "The office certainly appears to possess disadvantages."

"I will make them all over to Bessie," continued Sheba magnanimously. "Ted Sanderson has deserted me already; the others may follow suit. Oh! Mr. Hill," she added with a sudden change of voice, "I had almost forgotten your handkerchief; may I give it back to you—now?"

"If it will relieve your mind," he said pleasantly. Then, in a lower key and bending a little nearer to her, he said, "Wasn't there a little mystery about——about the other handkerchief, Miss Sheba?"

She started and looked up at him with a pale terrified face. "Oh," she said eagerly, "please don't ask. I—I mustn't tell—and there was no harm—nothing wrong."

"I never suspected that," he said reassuringly. "Only if you wish to avoid further remarks, you had better try and remove those bloodstains from your frock. There are more curious people in the world than I, Miss Sheba."

(To be continued.)

MY RECOLLECTIONS OF FREDERICK THE NOBLE.

By E. H. HUDSON.

THE first time I saw the then Crown Prince of Germany was on a bright spring day in March, 1873, in Berlin Cathedral, on the happy occasion of the General Thanksgiving for his recovery from a long and dangerous illness.

I had been spending some months in Berlin, and during that time its people of every class had been excited by the most agitating anxiety on account of the health of their beloved Prince. From his childhood they had seen his character developing all that is at the same time endearing, noble and trustworthy; and now they were justly proud of his military achievements in the lately concluded war, that had brought honour and glory to the Fatherland; yet, well the Germans knew that not one of them had welcomed peace more heartily than had their hero Prince.

I first saw the Imperial Crown Prince in a gallery of the densely-crowded Cathedral, standing between his two young sons, reverently joining in the service. The Crown Princess and his daughters, old enough to go to church, were also with him, and every member of the Imperial family then in Berlin was present. Prince William's countenance pleased me.

One felt that this great thanksgiving to the Almighty Author and Preserver of Life, had been preceded by earnest prayer in places of worship and in secret chambers.

The German Prince, like King Hezekiah, lived on for fifteen years; there the parallel ends, and striking is the contrast. The king of Judah mingled a prayer expressing agony of desire for the continuance of his own life, with complaints and tears. The Christian Prince has left a grand example of cheerful patience and resignation, and proof that he estimated the pomp and glory of this world more wisely than did King Hezekiah. The contrast brings out forcibly the great and most consoling truth that under God's blessing, in spite of all the evil and the sorrow by which this world sometimes seems to be flooded, we should look on the rainbow of Hope and trust Him who made it a token and a sign. He sitteth above the water floods, and under his beneficent rule, progress in the right direction is made, while years and centuries are rolling on. The hero of our day, whose character and conduct commands universal esteem, must be a nobler, higher-minded man than was the especially admired and beloved prince of two

thousand six hundred years ago. Hezekiah was altogether so noble and promising that the people of Judah and their great Prophet hoped that he might prove to be the long looked for king of the chosen line of David, who "shall reign in righteousness."*

On another occasion I was fortunate in seeing the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess in the midst of a brilliant and deeply interesting scene. The wife of one of the cathedral clergy, the Rev. William Bauer, kindly took me to the splendidly restored circular chapel of the old Electoral Castle, in which a religious service inaugurates the opening of Parliament. My friend pointed out to me nearly all the members of the Imperial family, and several of the remarkable persons, among whom were Bismarck and Von Moltke.

As from a gallery round the interior of the dome we watched the lively scene below, and saw the distinguished personages take their places, I thought our dear Princess Royal looked very happy. The weather was severe, and her husband was wrapping her in sable fur to guard her from taking cold.

The service was altogether impressive, and the musical part magnificently performed. Exquisitely clear and touching were the words of the appropriate 133rd Psalm—"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

I had not been introduced to their Imperial Highnesses, but already I had received an honour and kindness from the Crown Princess, who had graciously accepted the dedication of my yet unpublished "Life and Times of Louisa, Queen of Prussia." I have since been told that when my request reached the Princess, she inquired, "Is it the Miss Hudson who wrote 'Queen Bertha?'" On being told that it was the same author, she replied: "Yes, I accept the dedication, for we all like 'Queen Bertha.'" Our Queen had given a copy of that book to her grandson, Prince William, when he was in England, and he had taken it home to Berlin.

I had come to Berlin to study Queen Louisa's life after her marriage; having spent the previous winter and spring in Darmstadt to study her earlier life. I had also visited Hanover, her birth-place.

Everywhere I had been kindly welcomed, and materially assisted in making historical researches, and arrangements for seeing with my own eyes the spots connected with my subject. I was not treated as a stranger. The Germans with whom I came in contact saw and felt that I was not only earnestly endeavouring to

* The Jews still believe that the xxxii. Chapter of Isaiah applies to King Hezekiah and his good reign, but that it will be more perfectly fulfilled when "Messias" has come.

Every God-like man described by ancient seer or poet—every man truly superior to the multitude of his generation, is a more or less imperfect type of Him who is Perfect God and Perfect Man.—*Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.*

write a truthful life of their Queen Louisa, but also that I already knew her well enough to love her, so that my work was as much a labour of love as if I had been born a German. They treated me accordingly, and never shall I forget many delightful companions of those days, though here I can mention only Dr. Pertz, the Emperor's librarian, and his wife and daughter, and the Rev. William Bauer and his wife. How many pleasant evenings I spent with them! When inviting me, they often asked me to put a chapter of my manuscript in my bag that I might read it aloud.

When I had entered into the hospitable home in Hindersin Strasse, with what confiding faith I used to read the welcoming text, "*The Lord bless thy going out, and thy coming in.*"

Yes! And in spite of more difficulty and disappointment than I could anticipate, my going in and coming out of Germany, of its time-honoured cities and its happy homes, has been blessed, though not in the way I expected. It is natural and reasonable to expect substantial remuneration for the hard work of years, carefully done. The labour accomplished in life's working hours should do something towards providing for its eventide.

Well do I remember reading the last chapter of my manuscript. As I rolled it up I said, "How much I have enjoyed looking closely into this pure, amiable life, and into the stirring times that strengthened and brought out Louisa's character. How much I have enjoyed searching, and compiling, and travelling, and now all the pleasure is over, and all the anxiety and trouble is going to begin."

"Why should you say so?" replied *Hofprediger* Bauer. "You have such an excellent publisher in London—Mr. Strahan. I have heard him most highly spoken of by English clergymen, as not only a good publisher, but also as a particularly good, generous-minded and trustworthy man. He has brought out an English edition of my 'Religious Life in Germany during the Wars of Independence,' quite satisfactorily."

This strong, and evidently most sincere, recommendation greatly encouraged me. I was aware that my own judgment with regard to everything pertaining to the getting up of a book and bringing it out was worth nothing, as I knew nothing about it. I felt delighted to think I could confide in Mr. Strahan, whose name had long been familiar to me as that of a well-known publisher, who had brought out many popular books, such as suited the bent of my own mind.

I addressed my carefully-packed manuscript and a letter to Alexander Strahan, little dreaming that at this very time he was leaving the house he had founded. When the receipt of my manuscript was acknowledged I was not informed that any change had taken place in the publishing house. In the course of the correspondence that ensued with regard to terms, I was briefly

requested to address to Strahan and Co., but I believed that Alexander Strahan was at the head of the company. Therefore I trusted in his high reputation, and consented to what I supposed were his proposals. I had not the slightest idea that my work was not in his hands, and that he would have nothing to do with it and with the money I promised to advance. Believing implicitly that I was making the agreement with Alexander Strahan, I consented to every proposal, and yielded, though very reluctantly, my own desire with regard to illustrations. I was greatly disappointed by the objection, very positively expressed, against illustrating my work. I knew it must cost me more to do it, but I wished it could be done. I had made a most interesting collection of photographs, and a friend had taken some pencil sketches for me, that I might be able to show my readers almost every building and every spot connected with the life of Queen Louisa. Books on much less important subjects than the one I had chosen, and even children's books, are profusely illustrated in these artistic, picture-loving days. I thought of this, and could not understand why mine, which was to be got up on an arrangement of half-profits, was denied the advantage. I am sure that even tolerably well executed illustrations would have made the book more attractive. I had no relation or friend who understood the commercial part of the book business. This very book has made me friends who have expressed great regret that they were not acquainted with me in time to make suggestions that might possibly have led to a result more advantageous to me.

Happy in my ignorance, I made a tour to say good-bye to friends who had gone to Dresden, and to see Leipsic, Weimar, Gotha and Coblenz, and thence returned to London to carry my work through the press.

At 56, Ludgate Hill, I was informed that Mr. Strahan, whom I expected to see, had retired from business, and that Mr. Isbister would have the management of my book. His name was printed on the title page of the first edition.

The book had been out but a very short time when Mr. Isbister told me it had made "a capital start." He thought another edition would soon be required, and he said it would be well for me to begin to prepare for it, by carefully revising the volumes with a view to reprinting. I had begged that the type might be held for a little while, but this had not been done, and only 750 copies had been printed. Nevertheless, I was thankful for the satisfactory report of the sale, and I wrote to some of my German friends, who are well acquainted with the history of their own country, to tell them the good news, and to ask them to read their copies pencil in hand, to mark everything that needed attention, and to note for me the page and line. They all expressed satisfaction with the existing edition; two of them were kind enough to carry out my suggestion. Royal readers heard of

it, and sympathized in my desire to make my work as perfect as possible.

Great was my surprise when, on a day near the end of July, 1874, I received a letter from Countess Brühl, lady-in-waiting to the Crown Princess of Germany, who wrote to tell me that the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess had read my book and were much pleased with it, and that they would like to tell me so themselves, if I would go to Sandown on the 2nd of August. The countess wrote a second letter to name the 3rd as a more convenient day.

The Crown Prince and his family were staying in the Isle of Wight for six weeks' sea bathing. The Prince and Princess were at Idlewild, a small house surrounded by pleasant grounds sheltered by trees. Two cottages near accommodated the suite, and also the four daughters and the youngest son, with their governesses, tutor and attendants. All the members of the family bathed and walked every morning, and except the two little Princesses, they afterwards all assembled and breakfasted together at Idlewild.

At one of the cottages—Caroline House—I was very kindly received by Countess Brühl, in her apartments. The Crown Prince and the Crown Princess were out walking; when they had returned the countess took me to Idlewild. As we entered the grounds I saw a gentleman on the lawn.

"That," said the countess, "is the Crown Prince."

His Imperial Highness met us, and said, as he cordially took my hand, "Miss Hudson, how could you write that book; how could you do it so well?" He led me to a garden seat, saying, "We will sit down and have a little talk about the book." He asked the countess to send a servant for the two volumes. I felt glad to see that they had been made comfortable for use, by having been covered with strong brown paper.

The Prince began the conversation by assuring me that he had read every word of my "Life of his Grandmother," and he again said that he had wondered how I could do it so well.

As the Prince turned over the leaves of the first volume, part of which gives an introductory sketch of Prussian history, his Imperial Highness spoke of the difficulty which the earliest historians must have had in selecting the materials with which they compiled, and how much must have depended on the bent of each old writer's mind. With his pencil he had written the remark which I afterwards appended as a foot note to Vol. I., page 18, of the second and third editions.

When we had passed on to the body of the work, it became evident to me that he had not only read, but had, moreover, bestowed careful attention on every page. Very few passages needed correction; these were mostly what he called "printer's errors." The most important mistake I had made was in picturing

the scene of the coronation day of the Emperor Leopold the Second, at Frankfort, in 1790. I had said, "The streets were hung with flags, among which the black, red, and yellow standard of Germany was the most frequently repeated."

The Prince had struck out the word red, because the colours of the old German Empire were gold and black. Black, red, and yellow, as German colours, came into use after 1815.

The Prince spoke freely on the history, as he slowly turned over the pages, or looked for some point of time that occurred to him as especially interesting. I am sure he loved history, and was very highly gifted with the faculties necessary for diving into the past, and for perceiving how its records may be brought to bear on the needs and the questions of the present time. History is, like music, a science which all may learn, but in which only the gifted can excel; and, like music, it is much more than a science when it lifts up the heart of man to adore the Dispenser of every talent, the King of Kings, the Almighty Ruler of all the nations of the earth.

The Crown Prince told me that, when he was at Wiesbaden, he had heard of my being in Berlin, and had felt sorry that he was not there, as he would have shown me the palaces, "but," he added, "your book tells me that you have seen them, and I am glad you have done so, and should you visit Berlin again you must let us know."

I took advantage of the opportunity to ask if he could give me a little quite fresh information that had not yet been published, to weave into the second edition, as I had hitherto gathered materials from standard works of various authors, but had had no access to original papers. The Prince said: "I will look over my grandmother's letters to see if they contain anything that I could send to you." He told me that he had already fallen in with one small paper that he had put aside for me, as he thought of my book when he found it. It was Queen Louisa's motto, written by her own hand. The Prince described to me the German custom with regard to mottoes. A person composes or adopts an epigram expressing a principle or a strong sentiment. Sometimes the sententious sentence is original, but generally it is chosen from among the writings of a favourite author. Queen Louisa had taken hers from Luther.

The Prince said my book should have a frontispiece; he would give me a quite new portrait of Queen Louisa, from the first that had been taken after her marriage, which had never yet been copied in any way.

One more request I ventured to make, that I might have the honour of presenting a copy of my work to the Emperor of Germany.

"Send one here before we leave," replied the Crown Prince; "we will take it home, and I will give it to my father myself."

The Prince had thought about the dangers and difficulties of publishing. He said, from what he had heard, it appeared that only a very small portion of the proceeds of a book goes to the author, and that in most cases the best books are the least remunerative. The sympathy with which he commented on this surprised and touched me, but I was too intent on the higher objects of the interview to even wish to give any of those precious moments to lower and more selfish considerations. Very vivid are my recollections of that hour, even of the garden and the view beyond, though I never noticed the surroundings till our conversation was drawing to a close. So long as I retain these recollections I shall seem to hear the very pleasant voice speaking our language like an English prince, only a little more emphatically, which accorded well with the earnest manner.

The Prince said my work ought to be translated into German, because, although there were many biographies and memoirs of Queen Louisa, there was not a book at all like my "Life and Times"—nothing so thorough and complete.

His Imperial Highness was then reading "Sir George Jackson's Diaries and Letters." He had not heard of that book until he met with quotations from it in mine, which pleased him so much that he had sent for the volumes.

Looking across the lawn to the house I saw a lady stepping out of one of the French windows.

"Here comes the Princess," said the Crown Prince.

On which I rose to meet her Imperial Highness, who shook hands, thanked me for the book, and then with lively humour dispersed serious contemplations by relating a laughable anecdote concerning Queen Louisa, asking me if I had found it.

"But, my dear," said the Crown Prince, "Miss Hudson must not put that story into her next edition."

The Princess was wearing a very simply-made dress of white piqué, no trimming, enlivened by a small blue bow at the neck; her head had only the natural covering of beautiful soft hair, likewise simply arranged.

With good wishes their Imperial Highnesses took leave of me, and I returned to Caroline House and spent some time with Countess Brühl. She was very much enjoying, with the Imperial family, the excursions by sea and land, and the walks round Sandown. I had never yet spent a day and night on the island. The countess's descriptions of its scenery led me to decide on seeking a resting place there.

I was fortunate in finding a boarding house kept by a gentlewoman—a widow—who to maintain her family had adopted that mode of living.

During the month I spent there I now and then fell in with the Crown Prince and Princess in a place of public entertainment, or in a quiet spot, and they always met me kindly. Occasionally

I was invited to Caroline House by Countess Brühl, to whose mother and sister I had been introduced, and whom I had visited at Potsdam.

Prince Waldemar with his tutor lived in Caroline House. The fine handsome boy of seven years old often amused himself in the small garden in front of the cottage. One day the active little fellow, dressed in a sailor's suit, was manfully wielding a birch broom, the handle of which was taller than himself. With all his might he was sweeping the mould he had raked off the borders on to the gravel path. A tall footman, who might be a descendant of one of the giants of King Frederick William the First's favourite regiment, was standing by, watching the little prince, who was to be allowed to work out his own ideas on the subject of gardening. On another day he was skipping with delight beside a sailor who was carrying the model of a fine ship, with all her canvas spread, which had been presented to him.

At Sandown the family were all well and happy; happy, evidently, in their own family circle, and happy in helping to make others so. They were ready to take part in every kind of social gathering to which they were respectfully invited. Under their patronage, a bazaar for a charitable object proved a perfect success, and the regatta and the sports that followed gave the people a glorious afternoon. On that day the father and mother, towards whom all eyes were turned, leading their youngest little girl between them, walked through the village to a pavilion that had been erected in front of the sea, opposite to the starting point whence the boats were to race, and the space on the sands prepared for the sports. Among the crowds of spectators of all classes, no party seemed to enter into the spirit of the exploits on sea and land, and to enjoy the lively scene more heartily than did the Imperial family.

When the day of departure arrived I went to the crowded railway station, and there I had a last kind look from the Crown Princess; and from the Crown Prince a characteristic farewell greeting, as he shook hands with me, saying: "Miss Hudson, you may depend on my sending you what I have promised."

I went to Ryde on that bright clear afternoon, and from its long pier I watched, till it was out of sight, the vessel that was bearing them away.

I remained at Sandown a little longer. One morning when I was writing a letter in my own room, the lady of the house came with the *Times* newspaper in her hand, and startled me by expressing warm congratulations. A long review of my book had appeared, and a gentleman of our sociable party in the house had been reading it aloud, and had remarked that such a review ought to do me a great deal of good. Hitherto the work had been on the whole very favourably noticed.

A few days later I went on to stay at Shanklin; while there I

received a visit from one of my late companions in the house at Sandown. I welcomed her gladly, to which she replied :

"I am sorry that I have come to bring you bad news." The same gentleman who had read the review in the *Times* had now read something else, on which he exclaimed, "Miss Hudson's publishers have failed !"

He was afraid I might be very much injured, that it might be very bad for me. They talked the matter over, and came to the conclusion that I ought to know it, that I might try to get advice, and perhaps hasten to London.

I did so, but to no purpose, the only advice I obtained was to be careful that the second edition was not proceeded with before the accounts of the first had been completely settled. At the house in the City I perceived no signs of change.

I went home and settled down to the task of revising the two volumes, using the notes that had been given to me; and soon I was encouraged and cheered by receiving from Berlin all that the Crown Prince had promised to send. With his own hand he had traced Queen Louisa's motto, and he sent the negative of a photograph taken from Tischbein's picture, that any number of copies might be produced.

My spirits rose and I was hopeful of complete success, until the publisher's account came, inclosing a cheque for the balance, the amount of which greatly disappointed me. My relations and friends to whom I showed the account, thought that either I had not been fairly dealt with, or else that the publishers had made their calculations and arrangements without due consideration for the author. But my friends knew nothing at all about the publishing business and the book trade, only about business generally as gentlemen living in the country, not in any way connected with commercial affairs, commonly do.

I went to London to see Mr. Isbister. I did not feel disappointed in him personally, for, although I could not be certain, I felt almost sure that either he had nothing to do with the pecuniary part of the business, or else that he was overruled by others. He seemed to be fully occupied in various ways, and in seeing and corresponding with authors, and with getting up the books. I was satisfied with mine, and grateful for the attention he had bestowed on it. I was not sure that he was in the company of Strahan and Co., when I was consenting to the proposals I thought were Alexander Strahan's. At that time I had not even heard his name.

I liked Mr. Isbister, his frank manner pleased me, and made me feel able to speak openly to him. I said :

"Mr. Isbister, if a perfectly uneducated woman had spent as much time as I have devoted to this work, in picking up stones or potatoes, she would have earned as much as I have done."

He did not answer this remark, but I am sure he felt sorry for me; afterwards he said:

"You know, Miss Hudson, in business, successful books must help to pay for unsuccessful ones."

The edition was entirely sold out. I heard of persons who wished to procure the book, but could not do so, and when I thought of my friends in Germany who would soon be expecting copies of the new edition, I felt alarmed and vexed by the very unsatisfactory state of things. I did not reside in or near London. I had come up from the country on purpose to make arrangements for the reprinting, and determined to put my revised work, and the Crown Prince of Germany's contributions for its improvement (the frontispiece and the facsimile of Queen Louisa's writing), in hand without further delay. Mr. Isbister had made an appointment with me, but on going to his office I was told that he had been unexpectedly called away and they did not know when he would return. I received a letter of apology. He had been summoned to Scotland on account of his father's illness; the brief letter did not refer to the business I was impatient to settle. This worried me more than it would have done, had not my confidence in the house been previously shaken. Keeping on my lodging in a suburb of London was very inconvenient to me, but I could not bear the idea of going back into the country, having done nothing at all.

In my vexation and perplexity I thought of Mr. Strahan. I thought, he is still alive, and I recollected all that *Hofprediger* Bauer had said of his capabilities as a publisher, and of his high-minded character. I fancied that most likely he had made a fortune before his retirement. The failure that had alarmed my friends at Sandown was a more recent event. He might possibly, I thought, have still some power in the house that he had founded. Quite accidentally I met a person who knew him, and who introduced me to him.

I found Mr. Strahan in his office in Paternoster Row, where he was still editing the *Contemporary Review*. He then told me that he had gone out of the house on Ludgate Hill a few days before my manuscript arrived from Berlin.

I told him how strongly *Hofprediger* Bauer had advised me to trust in him, and how disappointed I had consequently felt on his retirement. I told him of my interview with the Crown Prince of Germany, and of what his Imperial Highness had given me for my next edition, and that, having prepared for reprinting, I was very much wishing it to be begun without further delay. He spoke well of the book. He said: "It is a good book, and a good book always makes its way."

He said he was glad he had seen me, and asked me to call again.

To my very great astonishment, Mr. Strahan offered to publish

the next edition. He said: "I could not do it when your manuscript arrived from Berlin, but I can do it now, and I will."

He assured me that he could get up the book and circulate it as well as he could have done in his large house in former years. He was going to Ireland on business, and he proposed that immediately on his return he should see me again to make final arrangements for putting the work in hand.

Week after week passed away; Mr. Strahan wrote me a few lines from Belfast, and at last came a letter from London appointing an interview at his house in Paternoster Row.

I was punctual to the time he had named, but I waited alone while the clock of St. Paul's chimed out a whole hour; and then Mr. Strahan came, but only to say he could not do it; he was sorry, but he found he was not sufficiently independent.

Convinced that I had better give up attempting to converse with publishers myself, I commissioned a legal gentleman, who is also an author, therefore accustomed to publishers' accounts, to settle the affair of the first edition. He said he wished he had had the opportunity of advising me at the onset instead of at the termination of the business. He settled on my behalf with the head of the house, Mr. Daldy, who had had nothing whatever to do with my book. He had lately got into the house above Mr. Isbister, but soon got out again.

Then I applied to several first-class publishers in turn. One whom I saw replied that had I sent my work to them in manuscript they would have been happy to have published it, but that they never republish a book that has been brought out not long ago by another house. He told me I should find, as a rule, it is generally so. Most of them declined in the formal style without giving a reason. One of these afterwards sent me a message of warning through a person who slightly knew me. He said: "Do try to persuade Miss Hudson not to change the publishers of her book, if it be possible to avoid so doing, as that is always very disastrous to an author."

I received this truly kind message, and also a letter from Mr. Isbister, inquiring as to my intentions with regard to another edition, too late to be available. I was then corresponding with the head of another house, and was feeling too hopeful of success with them to desire to go back to that under which my experience had been anything but happy, although my book, considering that it is an historical work, had been quickly sold out. Historical works do not sell as rapidly as do works of fiction or recent travels. In a first-class bookseller's shop I was told that they had sold a good many copies, that it was a book that had had quite a run, that it was out of print, and they were wondering when it would reappear.

The year 1875 had begun brightly for me. Early in January I had had the honour of receiving from the Emperor of Germany

a gold bracelet containing the portrait of his mother, Queen Louisa, painted on ivory. It was sent with a very gracious message from his Majesty.

But the year that had begun fortunately, proved a very sad one for me through family trouble—the passing away of my patrimonial property, and the serious illness of my only near relation. I was quite willing to make up for the loss of our property by working diligently with my pen, but such aspirations and endeavours get crushed out in these days, though they seem right. The only good view of this state of things must be obtained from the highest point, to which I was led by a few words from the editor of the “Dawn of Day.” He had told me that my slight biographical sketches were very well written, but too long for that magazine, and if shortened would be quite spoilt. He said: “Life is a struggle, and you must look upon these trials as your share in the battle.”

Very true; but I feel more strengthened to rise and stand up again when I repeat to myself words addressed to me by Dean Merivale, of Ely, when I was spending an afternoon at his house, and we had been speaking of history, particularly of that of Rome, and afterwards of the difficulties and trials of authorship. The dean said:

“Miss Hudson, never think that you are struggling alone, always remember that you are not alone, that we are all struggling together.”

It is so; and on life's crowded battle-field we need not lose sight of our Captain and His banner. “A good soldier” is bound to “endure hardness,” but this does not give men a right to be selfishly hard on one another, and surely they ought to be ready to give to women the helping hand. My private anxieties were so harassing that when a literary vexation or disappointment arose, I thought of the poor donkey carrying two heavily-laden panniers that balanced one another. In the autumn of 1879 I was very ill with bronchitis, and was advised to spend the coming winter and spring on the Western Riviera. This I was able to do by means of what I had received for a paper on “The Royal Mausoleum, Frogmore,” which had been published in the *Argosy*.

I went first to the “Home” for invalid ladies at San Remo, and in the spring to Pegli, where I again fell in with the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess of Germany and their family. They had been there since the middle of October. On the 18th of that month, Pegli was gaily decked with flags in honour of the Crown Prince's 48th birthday. The family had observed the day in a quiet domestic way, with very simple festivities. The presents were, according to the German custom, laid out, each one addressed by the giver with a few affectionate words, some in the handwriting of the children. The Crown Princess showed her

appreciation of her husband's love of history by giving him, that year, a rare edition of the first ten books of Livy.

The Crown Prince could not be long spared from Berlin, where he spent the winter, and rejoined his family at Pegli on the 1st of February.

I saw them all sitting in the front seats, opposite the Communion Table, in our pretty little English church. The service over, as the Crown Princess passed down the aisle, she quietly recognized me by her own pleasant expressive smile. Outside the church their Imperial Highnesses spoke to me of the beauties of Pegli and its surroundings, and expressed sympathy and good wishes with respect to my health, on account of which, as I told them, I had come on the Riviera.

The Crown Prince described to me the newly-erected statue of Queen Louisa in the Thier-garten, and said he must return to Berlin on the 9th of March, as he had promised to unveil it on the 10th, Queen Louisa's 104th birthday.

The Prince most graciously said that I ought to go to Berlin to see the ceremony on that occasion, which would have been delightful, but was not practicable.

When the Prince and Princess had passed on, the lady-in-waiting introduced me to ladies of the suite, and to Miss Byng, the governess, who said to Princess Victoria, "It is the lady who wrote the 'Life of Queen Louisa,' which you have read;" whereupon the young Princess and her little sisters shook hands with me. Princess Charlotte had lately married Prince Bernard of Saxe-Meiningen. About a year before her marriage I had lunched with her Imperial Highness at St. Leonards-on-Sea.

In conversation, she referred to passages of my book which her father had put into her hands to be read in the hours of study. This proof of confidence in my work gratified me more than any expressions of approval had done.

Countess Brühl was not then at Pegli, which I regretted; other ladies with the Crown Princess were courteous to me, and took interest in a literary subject that I was then contemplating—the life of Jacques Abbadie. The Crown Princess sent Dr. Delbrück, her son's tutor, to talk the subject over with me, and that gentleman afterwards most kindly made researches in the Berlin Library, and sent me the result; but we agreed in the conclusion that although the life of that remarkable man, spent in France, Prussia, Holland, England and Ireland, is full of interest and great variety, it would be hardly possible to bring it before English readers in a way that would be likely to be popular, and consequently successful. I gave it up, but I have always felt sorry I could not do it, as the information I had collected in London and Geneva, and some promised me from original papers in Ireland, must, I thought, be valuable, but it could not be linked on to any of the popular subjects of the present day. I

quite see now that the Life of Jacques Abbadie would have been a very hazardous venture, and I thank the Empress Frederick for having guarded me against it.

Pegli is a wretched Italian town; one looks in vain for indications of the domestic comfort of its labouring classes and its poor inhabitants; but they are lively and light-hearted, seem happy enough, with little or nothing of what we call home comfort, but wretchedness does not destroy picturesque effect. Pegli is a favourite place with artists, and it therefore suited the Crown Princess, who often found a bit of dilapidated building, or a water mill, or some characteristic scene, or a view that pleased her, which she sketched and painted.

The villas in their gardens on the hill sides, under the clear Italian sky, above the deep blue Mediterranean, are very pretty, especially in the rose season. Roses in all their various ways of growing, in all their delicate shades of colour, are everywhere, climbing, festooning, forming floral arcades and scenting the air. The views from those hills—we might without exaggeration call some of them mountains—are very extensive and lovely. The famous Pallavicini gardens cover one of the highest eminences, the top of which is surmounted by a temple, or summer house, we should call it. These public gardens are popular with all classes of people. The trees, flowers and magnificent views attract the upper classes, while for the multitude, all sorts of amusements, including optical illusions and practical jokes, are provided.

The gardens of the Doria Palace are simply beautiful. The British chaplain and his family had apartments in that old-fashioned palace. The Crown Princess painted a pretty portrait of his lively, dark-eyed little girl.

The distinguished visitors were occupying part of the Grand Hotel. It has a flourishing well-kept garden, which in that climate can be enjoyed all the year round. You can sit out of doors—almost live out of doors—enjoying the delicious scent of violets and other fragrant flowers, while your friends in England are being pinched by frost and snow and bitter winds.

The Crown Prince and his family were early risers, they made the most of time and sunshine. Before the people had sat down to breakfast, they might be seen starting on a long drive, or for a walk, which we sometimes fancied was to be a botanical ramble. We so thought when the Prince wore waterproof leggings, prepared perhaps for gathering rushes and the blossoms of water plants, and when the Princess and the children carried baskets.

On one afternoon I was invited to take tea with Miss Byng and the young Princesses. The Crown Prince came in, and with him General von Blumenthal, who during the campaigns of 1866 and 1870 had been the chief officer on the Crown Prince's staff.

On seeing me, the Prince said, "I am glad to see you here,

Miss Hudson," and as he took my hand, he exclaimed, in his genial way, "Ah! I see something!" and he called General Blumenthal to look at my bracelet, and told him it was a token of the Emperor's approbation of my book.

It was pleasant to see the little Princesses waiting on their father at the tea table. He was exceedingly fond of his children, and the little ones reciprocated parental affection with the warmth and open-heartedness of life's earliest sweetest season. I thought of this when, with deepest sympathy in the sorrow of the family, I read the last farewell:

"That you may always be religious, amiable and good as you have hitherto been is the wish of your dying father." His last day on earth was Princess Sophie's 18th birthday. So sad, yet such everlasting happiness in the never to be forgotten words.

When they were at Pegli, Princess Sophie was not ten years old; she was said to be like Queen Louisa; she was like portraits I had seen of the good Queen, and simple stories that I heard about the child strengthened my hope that the similarity extended to disposition and character.

Princess Margaret, two years younger, was thought like our Queen. Certainly she has her maternal grandmother's eyes, and had the healthy rosy colour described in all accounts of her Majesty's childhood. Her countenance reminded me of a day, long ago, on which I first saw our Queen, as a little princess, two years younger than myself, on her donkey at Ramsgate. Being children, we both naturally looked at one another so earnestly, that I have never lost the impression made by that bright, keenly observant little face, under the cottage straw bonnet.

The Crown Prince of Germany was obliged to go back to Berlin to be near the aged Emperor, who never liked to be long separated from his only son. The Crown Princess remained a little longer at Pegli. A mournful time was approaching, which she wished to spend very quietly, the first anniversary of Prince Waldemar's death. He had died very suddenly of diphtheria, in the palace near Potsdam, then called Neues Palais, though built by Frederick the Great, now Friedrichskron, and was buried in the Church of Peace—laid beside his little brother Sigismund, whom he had never known.

That fine church was erected by Frederick William the Fourth. Above the marble slab which bears that king's name, and covers the entrance to the royal vault, looking down the centre aisle, stands an angel in pure white marble. The expression of earnest listening and waiting for the word of command to sound the trumpet and to hand up the book is wonderfully well given. The statue serves as both a monument and a lecturer; the Holy Scriptures seem to rest on the angel's wings.

Prince Waldemar was not only much grieved for by his parents, he was also heartily regretted by every one who knew him; he was such a promising good boy.

While I was at Pegli I received Hatchards' account for publishing the second edition of my "Life of Queen Louisa." The balance was fearfully on the wrong side, and has never turned.

The Crown Princess thought it would be well if I could write for periodicals. With a view to so doing, I acted under her Imperial Highness' direction with regard to a small manuscript that she kindly read. It was sent to the editor of a magazine, for which she considered it particularly (she said exactly) suitable, but it was declined.

The Crown Princess made an excursion to Rome and Naples on leaving Pegli. On her homeward *route* she was joined by her family at Genoa, and the Crown Prince met them at Düsseldorf. They went to see the mother house of Pastor Fliedner's flourishing institution, which provides homes, hospitals and schools. The husband and wife so heartily one, so united in the energizing desire to be continually studying, encouraging and advancing the high and difficult art of doing good, were very much interested in what they saw. Branches of this institution are spreading widely. The Crown Prince had visited their schools at Jerusalem in 1869, when he went to the East, to attend the opening of the Suez Canal.

Before the end of May, the happy family party that I had seen at Pegli, were again at home in Berlin; and on the 2nd of June the elder son, Prince William, was betrothed to the Princess Augusta Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, the eldest daughter of Duke Frederick. The bride-elect was twenty two years of age, tall and very graceful. The ceremony of the betrothal took place in the beautiful little palace of Babelsberg, not far from Potsdam; the lovely quiet home to which the Crown Prince and Princess during the early days of their married life retired, when they could be absent from Berlin. This charming country residence has every attraction that ground, naturally picturesque, clothed with fine timber, ornamented with rare trees and shrubs, and delightful bright gardens can give. The windows of the palace overlook what may be called lake and river scenery, as the Havel spreads its water here and there with exquisite effect. Babelsberg was the Emperor William the First's favourite country home in his latter years, after his son had removed to the larger palace, built by Frederick the Great. When I saw Babelsberg I observed, while passing through his Majesty's bedroom, life-sized busts of his father and mother on either side of his bed.

Not long after the betrothal of their eldest son, the happy parents went to Kiel to meet Prince Henry on his return from a two years' voyage. Prince William was married in the following year, on February 27th, 1881.

I did not see the Crown Prince of Germany again until he was in England taking part in the celebration of our Queen's Jubilee. No one who obtained a passing view of the grand procession to

Westminster Abbey could fail to mark in the cavalcade of Royal Princes that gallant Prince, wearing the white uniform and silver helmet of the Prussian Cuirassiers, Queen Louisa's own regiment.

A few days afterwards, on a Sunday afternoon, I saw the Crown Prince of Germany in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. I was very much wishing to see his Imperial Highness, for already his health was a subject of anxiety, therefore I felt very thankful to see him looking as well as he did. The impression I retained of his strong-built, noble figure and his fine face, as, in plain clothes, with uncovered head, he stood in the choir of the chapel, buoyed up, for months, my hope that he would recover.

The improved accounts we received at the time of Queen Victoria's visit to Charlottenburg so much encouraged me, that between that event and Prince Henry's marriage I sent a copy of the lately published German edition of my book, which was most graciously accepted by the Emperor Frederick the Third. He had decidedly expressed the opinion that it ought to be translated into German.* Professor Gruner, of Dresden, would have effected this long ago, had not his death prevented the accomplishment of his intentions.

As the Emperor was feeling better when the book was put into his hands, and he seemed pleased with it, I hope he may have looked into it, and have felt satisfied with the way in which my work is put before his people, whom he loved till he drew his last breath. May we not believe that Love cannot die, although the state of existence in which it reigns supremely is beyond our comprehension—and must be so, until we are one by one called away by the Commander under whom it has been our high privilege to fight the Battle of Life. Every one who has bravely taken part in the conflict against Evil has been, or will be called to take part in the everlasting promotion of Good—called to see his Leader as a King, and to be prepared for the higher work of the happy future. Each will have his appropriate and appointed place at the last great coronation of the Mighty One, who delights not in war, for he is the Prince of Peace.

Then we shall know the full meaning of the words:

"Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end."—*Isaiah ix., 7.*

* The German edition is published at Leipzig: Verlag von Kalr Fr. Pfau.

BETWEEN FOUR WALLS.

By CURTIS YORKE,

AUTHOR OF "HUSH!" "DUDLEY," ETC.

IT was snowing steadily—a small, fine, deliberate snow, which was swiftly filling up every little crack and crevice where a snow crystal could possibly lodge, and evidently meant business. For the matter of that, it had been snowing, off and on, for the last three days, but these intermittent showers had now settled down into a blinding snowstorm. There was nothing to be seen but snow—floating, whirling, dancing, in mad, fiendish, fantastic glee, as though it never meant to leave off. It was a dreary prospect. So, at least, thought a young girl who was toiling through the wintry dusk—a tiny, elf-like creature, with a small pale face, and brown curly hair blown about a pair of pathetic dark eyes, which looked as if they might not be very far from tears. For she was not only worn out and wet through, poor little soul, but she had lost her way. To be lost on Dartmoor in a snowstorm is no joke, I can tell you; and to make matters worse—if they could be made worse—it was now quite dark, and the wind was rising steadily. All at once the girl slipped—fell forward—a glimmer of light flashed before her eyes—and with a long, sobbing cry, she sank down, down, into a treacherous snowdrift.

Not a hundred yards away, two men were luxuriously enjoying their post-prandial pipes, in a small heavily-raftered room, which looked like nothing except what it was, namely, the principal apartment in a tiny shooting-box, intended, to all appearance, solely and entirely for the use of the sterner sex. A roaring fire blazed in the yawning grate, almost putting to shame the light of the lamp which stood on a small table near the hearth, in company with some dried fruits and a bottle of Burgundy.

"By Jove! how cold it is," said the elder of the two men, as he threw another piece of coal on the fire.

"Cold? it's the very deuce," shivered his companion. "Wonder if it still snows," he went on, rising, and sauntering towards the yet unshuttered window as he spoke.

He was a tall, fair, good-looking fellow, of perhaps thirty, with dark blue, rather passionate eyes, and sunny hair.

"Worse than ever!" he muttered. "I say, Lance, this looks cheerful. Old Wellings will be snowed up on the road if he doesn't mind," he added. "He ought to be back by this time."

"Horrible contingency," murmured the individual addressed as Lance, with a lazy smile, as he filled his pipe anew. "If he doesn't get back, we are in for the pleasing exercise of cooking our own dinners, making our own beds, and 'doing for ourselves,' generally, for an indefinite time. For I venture to predict that we too are safe to be snowed up before the morning." He leaned back in his chair as he spoke, and closed his grey eyes sleepily, as though the prospect didn't disturb him very much.

He was not a handsome fellow, Lancelot Darrell, but he had a kind, strong, refined face which somehow invariably impelled those about him to trust him implicitly. This was mainly due, I think, to a certain indefinable something about either his eyes or his mouth, I am not sure which—or perhaps both.

All at once he sat up and said hastily,

"I say, Carruthers, did you hear a noise outside?—a little cry, like a child's or a woman's?"

"No; can't say I did," returned the other. Then, after listening for a moment or two, he added, "I hear the wind, but nothing else."

Darrell rose and came over to the window. As he stood, it was noticeable that he was scarcely so tall as his companion; he was better built, though, and his general physique was more powerful. He threw up the sash, and vainly tried to pierce the gathering darkness beyond. All was silent outside, save for the fitful moan of the fast-rising wind, and the soft intermittent sweep of the snow against the window-panes. Suddenly, almost close at hand it seemed, there came a faint, uncertain little cry. Both men started, and Darrell went out into the tiny square hall and opened the outer door.

"Is any one there?" he called out in his clear, pleasant voice.

"Oh, come quick, please," was the answer in sobbing, childish tones.

"A child, by Jove!" he muttered, plunging out into the snowy darkness.

A moment or two later he shouted:

"Show a light here, Gilbert, will you?"

Carruthers did as he was desired, and stood in the doorway holding the lamp aloft in amazement.

"What the devil is it?" he exclaimed, as Darrell, carrying a drenched dark bundle in his arms, hurried past him into the house.

"What is it?" Carruthers repeated, following the other into the sitting-room, and setting down the lamp in a bewildered kind of way.

"Get the brandy, there's a good fellow," was the only reply, as Darrell placed the bundle gently on the sofa, and knelt down beside it.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Gilbert under his breath, as he got out

the brandy, "here's a rum go, and no mistake!" For he had caught a brief glimpse of a pale, sweet little face, and long tangled hair. Was it a child?—or a woman?

After some time—it seemed an abnormally long time to both men—the eyes opened, and their owner sat up, pushing back her hair nervously, and gazing in startled amazement at the two concerned masculine faces before her.

"How—how did I get here?" she faltered. "I remember nothing but snow and darkness, and that I felt myself falling—falling—then I heard a voice—I tried to call out——" She stopped, and put her little hands confusedly to her head. Then she added, turning her great dark eyes upon Darrell, "Did you—find me?"

"Yes," he answered, with a kind little smile. "You must have slipped down the bank at the end of the house. We heard you cry out, and I found you." He unfastened and removed her cloak and hat as he spoke, and hung them to the fire, while Gilbert wheeled forward a large easy-chair, and stirred the coals into a fiercer blaze.

"Do you feel better now?" said the latter.

"I feel very cold," she answered in a weak little voice. And she shivered. "My clothes are so wet, you know," she added, looking up at him pathetically.

"By Jove, yes, of course, so they are!" he said in some perplexity. "You must have them dried in some way."

"Had I not better try to get home?" she went on helplessly. "I live near Tavistock. Am I far from there?"

"We are seven miles from Tavistock," said Darrell, who was pulling at his moustache in an absent way he had when disturbed or perplexed—and just now he was both.

The girl rose to her feet with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said in a terrified voice. "My aunt will be so dreadfully anxious. Oh, I *must* get back to-night."

"I fear it is impossible," said Carruthers gravely. "It is not only a fearful snowstorm even for Dartmoor, but with this wind the snow will drift so abominably. It is drifting now."

"Was it not a little imprudent to venture so far from home in such threatening weather," said Darrell, with a half-reproving smile.

"I did not mean to go very far," she answered. "I had gone to see a poor woman who lives on the edge of the moor; but I stayed too late, and then the snow came on worse than ever. And then I lost my way. Oh, I must have walked for miles and miles," she sighed, "for I am so tired."

"Poor little thing," said Darrell, with much the same compassionate tenderness he would have used to a child—and, indeed, the girl looked little more. "Your people will be terribly anxious

about you, I'm afraid, but it is really utterly out of the question for you to get to Tavistock to-night."

"Do you mean that I must stay here?" she said, looking up at him with eyes in which there was more than a suspicion of tears.

"I'm afraid I do," he answered kindly. "And I am equally afraid that we cannot make things as comfortable for you as we should like to do. The fact is, we are two helpless bachelors, with every prospect of being doubly helpless, for the old man who acts as our servant on the few occasions when we come down here, went to Princetown this forenoon for supplies, and has evidently found the roads impassable, as he has not returned."

"Oh, *what* will Aunt Priscilla say!" she murmured in a nervous, faltering little voice. Then, after a pause, "I ought to tell you who I am, I suppose. My name is Leslie Heath. My aunt is Miss Carlyon. She has taken The Grange for three years."

"Carlyon," said Darrell quickly. "I knew a man Carlyon in the —th Lancers. He was junior major ten years ago."

"Ah, that must have been my uncle Jim," she said, flushing brightly. "He has been in India ever since I can remember."

"And is it possible that you are Jim Carlyon's niece?" he exclaimed, with a pleased light in his grey eyes. "Then we may almost claim acquaintance, Miss Heath, for he used to be a great chum of mine out in Simla."

The girl looked at him with a puzzled earnestness for a second or two. Then she said gravely:

"I think you must be Captain Darrell, are you not?"

"Yes," he answered, looking surprised. "My name is Darrell —Lancelot Darrell. And this is my friend and *alter ego*, Gilbert Carruthers."

"I have so often heard Aunt Priscilla speak of you," she said to Darrell, when she had bestowed a sweet little smile on Carruthers. "You once saved uncle Jim's life, did you not?" she added, with an awed inflection in her voice.

"Oh, no, hardly that," he answered hastily.

Here Carruthers, who had been feeling rather out of it, observed very sensibly that if Miss Heath sat much longer in her wet clothes she would most certainly catch cold.

"But what am I to do?" she said piteously.

Darrell pulled his moustache again with a perplexed air.

"You see—er—that is—well, as this is a bachelor establishment," began Carruthers, not very lucidly, "you know, of course, we—er—" Then he stopped, and stirred the fire violently, being, in fact, not very sure what he intended to say.

There was a moment's pause, and then Miss Heath, being divided between a sense of the ludicrousness of her situation and the consciousness that she was feeling miserably cold and painfully embarrassed, suddenly, and to the utter consternation of her companions, burst into a storm of hysterical sobs. She looked so

small, so childish, so forlorn, and yet so lovable, as she sat there in her dripping garments, that the hearts of both men went out to her with a curious protecting tenderness.

"Miss Heath!" exclaimed Carruthers, after a dismayed glance at Darrell. "Oh, by Jove! poor little thing!"

Darrell poured out a little brandy, diluted it well, and held it to her lips.

"Hush, hush!" he whispered soothingly. "Drink this—it will do you good."

When he had set down the glass again, he went out of the room, turning at the door to say abruptly:

"Carruthers—come here for a minute. I want you."

They turned into the little firelit kitchen, and stood for a few minutes staring at each other in silence. Then Carruthers laughed a little.

"What's to be done?" he said. "It's deuced awkward for the poor little thing—deuced awkward all round, in fact!"

"It's more than awkward," returned Darrell seriously. "The poor child will catch her death of cold. She ought to have off these wet things and be got to bed at once. But then——" He stopped, and frowned slightly.

"Well—er—there's my dressing-gown, don't you know," hazarded Carruthers.

"For the matter of that, there's mine," was the rather curt reply. "And I'll tell you what, Gilbert—I can have a shake-down with you for to-night, and Miss Heath can have my room. It's rather larger than yours. And we'll take some hot coals from here, and make up a roaring fire."

"All right. Just light a candle, will you, while I look where that old idiot has put the shovel."

Meanwhile the poor little visitor was sitting disconsolately beside the sitting-room fire.

"What horrible predicament have I got myself into?" she muttered hysterically. "I wish old Catty Lindon had been at the bottom of the sea before I went to see her to-day. Oh, what shall I do? I can't stay here all night with these two men. They must wish me far enough, I'm sure, though they try not to let me see it. I *must* get home to-night; and if I don't, what *shall* I do for dry clothes?" And then for sheer weariness, and cold, and mortification, she began to sob again. Poor little woman! she was not quite eighteen, and very young at that.

Some ten minutes later the door opened, and Darrell came in alone.

"Now, Miss Heath," he said, seating himself beside her, and speaking very gently, but very firmly too, "we must have no more tears."

But she interrupted him.

"Can I not go home?" she faltered, looking up at him with

tear-drowned eyes. "In some way surely I might manage, might I not?"

He shook his head.

"My dear child," he said, "I fear it is quite impossible. I would take you back to The Grange at once, I need hardly say, if it could be managed in any way at all. But the roads by this time are sure to be blocked. We should only have to turn back again."

"Are you—I mean, is there no one here but you and—your friend?" she asked, after a short pause, twisting her fingers in an embarrassed kind of way.

"No, no one," he answered gravely, but with the merest suspicion of a smile under his brown moustache. "But you are not afraid of us, are you? You don't take us for ogres, I hope? Because I am afraid it is quite inevitable that you must be our guest for to-night. Now," very gently, "be a good, sensible little woman, and promise to do what I tell you, for I am horribly exercised in my mind lest you should take cold. Will you promise?"

Leslie hesitated a moment, then made up her mind to the inevitable.

"Yes," she murmured, looking up trustfully into the kind strong face and steady grey eyes.

"That's right," he said approvingly. He had risen, and was mixing some brandy and hot water in a tumbler. "Your room is quite ready, at least it will be when the fire burns up," he continued, setting down the kettle again, and speaking in a calm, matter-of-course voice, as though her presence in the house was the most ordinary occurrence possible. "And I want you to promise me that when you go to your room you will put your feet in hot water *at once*, as hot as you can bear it—you will find everything in readiness—and just before you get into bed drink this," touching the tumbler he held, "and go to sleep as fast as you can. And, by the way, be sure to hang your wet things to the fire. You must not mind my saying all this to you," he went on, as a slow, painful blush dyed the girl's fair face. "You know I am quite an old fellow, old enough to be your father—or your uncle Jim," he added with a smile.

At that moment Carruthers entered the room.

"Miss Heath," he said good-humouredly, "has Darrell not told you that your room is quite ready? He and I are going to take out diplomas as first-class housemaids. Come and inspect our labours."

Leslie rose, and both men accompanied her across the narrow little hall to a half-open door, through which the bright light of a fire gleamed cheerily.

"You will find things awfully primitive, Miss Heath," said Carruthers, as she gave him her hand, "but you will excuse deficiencies, won't you?"

"Excuse them?" she said in a low voice. "I don't know how to excuse myself for giving you so much trouble. And—and I am *sure*," she added uncertainly, "that I have turned one of you out of your room." As she spoke she knew, in a flash, as it were, that it was Darrell she had turned out of his room.

"Good-night," said the latter, with a kindly smile. "You will be good and obedient, will you not, and you won't forget this?" giving her the tumbler he carried.

When the two men got back to the sitting-room again, they took possession of their respective chairs, lit their pipes, and sat perfectly silent for quite five minutes. Carruthers spoke first.

"I say, Lance," he said seriously, "do you suppose there's the slightest chance that Wellings will come back to-night?"

"Not the faintest, I should say," was the answer. "Indeed, I am very much afraid the roads won't be navigable for some days—that we are prisoners, in fact."

"The deuce! Then what are we to do with that girl?"

"Well—if we can't get out, I suppose she can't get out either."

"Humph! It's confoundedly awkward."

"I quite agree with you. It *is* awkward."

There was a pause; then Carruthers said:

"Curious that you should know her people."

"Yes, it was curious," replied Darrell, as he struck a match.

"She seems a nice little thing," went on the other. "Awfully young, too, and not bad-looking."

Darrell made no reply. He was lying back in his chair, watching the blue rings of smoke curl upwards to the rafter-bound ceiling.

"How do the rations stand?" he asked suddenly.

"Phew! I don't know!" exclaimed Gilbert, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and sitting up straight in his chair. "Now that I come to think of it, there can't be a superabundance, or Wellings wouldn't have trudged to Princetown in the teeth of a coming storm. Old fool! as if he couldn't have seen to things sooner," he muttered, resuming his former position.

"Well, we must inspect the supplies in the morning," said Darrell tranquilly. "By Jove, how the wind whistles!"

"Yes, and the snow is up to the ledges of the windows already," returned the other, "at least, it was steadily progressing that way when I opened the back door. Heaven knows how high it'll be before morning. It's an awful pity we didn't go last week, Lance. I knew this would come."

"In which case poor Miss Heath would most certainly have been frozen to death," Darrell answered quietly.

Carruthers looked serious.

"Ah, yes, I forgot that," he said. "Poor little girl, yes, of course."

Meanwhile Leslie Heath, in the seclusion of her room (or

rather, to speak more correctly, Captain Darrell's room) was inspecting her quarters with some curiosity. It was a good-sized room, quite as large as the sitting-room, uncarpeted, and of severe, almost military simplicity in its appointments. It looked very cosy, however, in the light of the roaring heaped-up fire, which blazed in the wide grate, and shone brightly on the bare walls and on the bars of the narrow brass bedstead. A gun-case and a battered portmanteau, almost covered with half-effaced labels, occupied one corner of the room, and a couple of tweed coats, smelling strongly of tobacco, hung behind the door.

Tired and cold though she was, a wild desire to scream with laughter took possession of the girl as she noted the arrangements made for her comfort. A large bath was placed immediately in front of the fire, and beside it stood a can of steaming hot water. A pile of clean towels lay on a chair.

"Six—no, seven," murmured Leslie, counting them in much amusement.

On the bed was conspicuously displayed a masculine dressing-gown, warm and grey and soft. As this last met her view, Leslie abandoned herself to the agonies of noiseless laughter.

"Poor fellows!" she said half aloud, "how good of them, and yet—how *funny*!" Here she choked again. "Oh, what *would* Aunt Priscilla say? How nice they are—especially Captain Darrell. And how very strange that I should make his acquaintance in such an outrageous way. Old enough to be my father, he said. Well, he does not look it. I wonder how much brandy he put in this," regarding with much distaste the tumbler she had just set down.

She took off her drenched little gown, and her equally drenched boots and stockings, and having put them to dry, brushed out her hair with an ivory-backed brush on which an inextricable silver monogram flourished, baffling all her efforts to decipher it. Then she examined a little pile of books which lay on the mantelpiece, consisting of a couple of French novels, a railway time-table, and a small morocco-bound Bible. On the fly-leaf of this last was written:—"Lancelot E. Darrell, from his loving mother." It *was* his room, then, the girl thought with a curious sense of satisfaction. At this point she became aware that she was feling rather sleepy; so she obeyed Darrell's instructions to the letter, extinguished the candle, jumped into bed, and in two minutes was fast asleep.

When she awoke the fire was out, and the room in darkness; so she promptly went to sleep again. From this sleep she was awakened by footsteps passing her door, and by the sound of subdued voices. She got out of bed, lit her candle, and looked at her watch. It was twenty minutes to twelve. Surely it must be more than that, she thought in some perplexity. She felt as if she had been asleep for a long time. All at once she became

conscious of a strong, pervading odour of newly-made coffee, mingled with the appetising fragrance of fried bacon. Was it possible it could be nearly twelve noon? She drew aside the window-blind, and looked out. It was pitch dark. Much puzzled, she examined the clothes she had hung to the fire. They felt quite dry. By this she knew that many hours must have elapsed. Besides, the room felt so cold that she also knew the fire must have been out for some time. Like a flash, it occurred to her that the snow had risen above the windows, that, in fact, they were literally snowed up!

She made a hurried toilette, then, candle in hand, she went out into the little hall. At the same moment a door opposite opened, and Carruthers came out.

"Good morning, Miss Heath," he said. "Darrell and I were just holding a council of war as to whether or not we ought to let you know that in spite of the darkness, it is time you had some breakfast."

"Oh, we *are* snowed up, then?" she said in a troubled voice.

"Very much so," was the laughing reply.

"Good morning, Miss Heath," said Darrell, as the girl advanced into the room. "How did you sleep? I trust you are none the worse for your wetting?" he added, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"I slept very well," she answered slowly. "And I am not a bit the worse. Is it still snowing?"

"I am afraid so. Come and have breakfast. I am sure you must want it."

"We kept yours warm for you," said Carruthers, carefully lifting a covered dish from before the fire. "We must apologize for being rude enough not to wait for you, but we were awfully hungry—at least I was."

"Well, so am I," confessed Miss Heath, seating herself at the table, and accepting a plate of bacon from Carruthers and a cup of coffee from Darrell. "But," she said suddenly, with a funny little smile and uplifting of her eyebrows, "has your servant come back? And if he has not—who cooked the bacon and made the coffee?"

"We did," replied Carruthers with pardonable pride. "At least, I fried the bacon and Darrell made the coffee. He says the bacon is done to death, and I say the coffee is muddy. What do you say?"

"I say they are both delicious," said the girl demurely. "I *do* wish I had seen you—as cooks, I mean," she added with a rippling little laugh.

"There is every probability that you may see us in that engaging capacity for some days to come," said Darrell rather ruefully.

"*Some days?*" she echoed, setting down her cup in dismay. "Do you mean to say I can't go home even to-day?"

Instead of answering, Darrell pointed to the window, where the prospect was black indeed, being simply Egyptian darkness.

"Do you know how far you are from *The Grange?*" he said then, looking at her with amused, kindly eyes. "Quite five miles. Look how the snow has drifted already; and it is still snowing."

"Oh, Aunt Priscilla will be quite crazy," said poor Leslie in a despairing kind of way. "And *what* a nuisance I shall be to you both!"

"Do you think so?" said Darrell gravely, as he took her cup. "That is very unkind of you. Have some more coffee?"

"Let us take Miss Heath up to the loft, and show her the promising state of the surrounding country," suggested Carruthers, when the visitor had resolutely refused any further nourishment.

"But—the table! It must be cleared," she said reprovingly.

"Oh—er—yes, of course," he replied in doubtful tones. "Come on, Darrell!"

"I shall help," said Miss Heath, who had thrown care and Aunt Priscilla to the winds, and was beginning to enjoy herself immensely. "Where is the kitchen?" she continued, seizing the coffee-pot. "You lead the way with the lamp, please, Mr. Carruthers!"

The kitchen was in a state of indescribable confusion. Plates, knives, pans, &c., were thrown about impartially on chairs, table, and floor. A cheery fire was burning, however, and threw an air of rollicking joviality over the whole scene.

"Put them down anywhere," said Darrell, recklessly depositing on the nearest chair the cup and saucer and plate he carried.

"Oh no," remonstrated Leslie, "they must be washed and put away properly."

"Washed!" echoed both men helplessly.

"Of course," was the inflexible reply, as the speaker invested herself in a large white apron, which, by the way, was most becoming.

"Oh, I say, not just now, Miss Heath," entreated Carruthers pathetically. "There are lots of clean ones about somewhere, and you've no idea how awfully done up we both are. Why, lighting these fires alone—not to mention the cooking—took us a good hour. Darrell used more bad language over the sitting-room fire this morning than I've heard him give way to all the years I've known him."

They all laughed, and Leslie, with a disapproving shake of her curly head, began in a deft, delightfully business-like way, to reduce the scattered dishes, &c., to some kind of order, while the two men

seated themselves on the partially-cleared table, and watched her with combined interest and amusement.

"Now we must have some hot water," announced this new autocrat of the kitchen. "We can't wash dishes in cold water, you know," she proceeded kindly to explain.

"Why not?" Carruthers ventured to inquire.

But Miss Heath did not answer. She was rummaging in a drawer for towels. She looked quite at home, and as busy and happy as possible. So her two slaves meekly got off the table, filled up the kettle, and replenished the fire.

"While it is heating I shall go up with you to the loft," Leslie said then graciously. "Perhaps it has left off snowing. What a dear little house it is," she exclaimed, as, after a short inspection of the tiny dwelling—which was all on one floor, bungalow fashion—they prepared to climb the ladder leading to the loft.

"You are right," acquiesced Darrell reflectively, "it is small, and, yes—it is most certainly dear. Give me your hand, Miss Heath, and mind your head on that beam."

"Dear me, daylight comes on one quite with a shock," said the girl, blinking her eyes a little. "Oh, oh!" she went on in dismayed tones, as she took a bird's-eye view of the surrounding country from the small sloping skylight, through whose crevices the snow whirled in merrily. "Why, I can see nothing but snow! No road—and what a black sky, as if it might snow for weeks. Oh I shall *never* get home. This is terrible!" she concluded despairingly, all her gay spirits deserting her.

"Never is a long day," said Darrell encouragingly. "We will hope for better things. You had better come down now, Miss Heath; it is far too cold for you up here."

So they descended to the kitchen again, and with more zeal than discretion on the part of two of the performers, washed and dried the dishes, thereby breaking two plates, and cracking a tumbler. When this laborious occupation was over, it was discovered that the sitting-room fire had quietly gone out, and by the time it was lighted again Carruthers suggested that they should have something to eat. "We don't want to cook anything, you know," he said gleefully. "There's a cold pie and things in the larder."

So they had the "cold pie and things," washed down by a bottle of Burgundy, and felt much refreshed and invigorated thereby. Then Carruthers went up to the loft again to reconnoitre, and came back with the mingled tidings that it had stopped snowing, but was freezing hard.

"Then we must get the door open, and try to clear some of the snow from the windows," said Darrell; "for this prolonged lamp-light is rather depressing."

After some time, and with considerable difficulty, they got the

door open, and set to work with a will. Meanwhile Leslie, left to her own devices, put her own room to rights, made up the fires, and explored the larder. There was plenty of bacon, another cold pie, and an apple tart, besides a couple of fowls, and a fair supply of tinned meats. There were also two tins of condensed milk, and a jar of Liebig; half a dozen loaves, but no butter, and no vegetables whatever. Coffee there was in abundance.

Shortly after dusk, the windows were comparatively clear; and when the men came in, cold and hungry, half an hour or so later, they exclaimed with pleasure at the inviting aspect of the kitchen, which was in a state of rampant neatness and illumined by a roaring fire. A dainty little figure half-concealed in an enormous white apron was flitting about, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and an air of gleeful, childlike importance.

"Oh, there you are," it said as they entered. "How cold you both look! I was just coming to ask if you would mind having dinner or supper, or whatever it is to be, here; it is so warm and cosy, and will save ever so much trouble, not to mention coals. Because you know," she added with an adorable seriousness, "we must be careful of them."

"So we must," acquiesced Carruthers gravely. "Besides, it will be twice as jolly here. Let me light the lamp, Miss Heath."

They all helped to get the somewhat heterogeneous evening meal ready, and when it was over they drew round the fire in quite a cosy friendly fashion. Leslie insisted that her hosts should smoke their cigars or pipes as usual.

"Just as if I weren't here, you know," she said coaxingly.

It was wonderful how much at home she felt and looked already. She made a winsome little picture enough, as she sat curled up in a big easy-chair brought by Darrell from the other room for her benefit. She was not exactly pretty, that young man decided, as he looked at her from his dark corner at the other side of the fireplace—but there was something wonderfully lovable and attractive about the pale little face with its fluffy brown hair, and its great dark eyes out of which the pure fearless woman's soul looked so trustfully. A man might safely give his heart into the keeping of such a sweet little woman, he reflected further. Then he pulled himself up with a start, and frowned slightly at his own folly.

"I know one thing," said Carruthers suddenly, as he stretched himself out in his chair, and lit a fresh cigar—"there's not a single dish of any kind or description going to be washed in this house to-night."

Leslie laughed; then she grew suddenly grave.

"Aunt Priscilla will think I am *dead*," she said looking meditatively into the fire. "I do wish I had not ventured out yesterday; it was most unlucky."

Both men were silent; for they could not honestly say they

agreed with her. On the contrary, I fear that with an utter disregard for the feelings of poor Aunt Priscilla, they were rather glad that a capricious chance had thrown this winsome little maiden on their protection. It seemed curiously natural and familiar to see her sitting there, to see the firelight glinting on her hair, to hear her childlike laugh. It seemed incredible that they were unconscious of her very existence yesterday—only yesterday!

Next day passed much as its predecessor had done, except that the men worked hard all the morning—clearing the snow from about the house, while Leslie attended to the domestic arrangements herself. In the afternoon Carruthers distinguished himself by concocting a fearful and wonderful stew for supper, which it appeared he had known and loved in India. Leslie looked on in sarcastic disapproval, and Darrell chopped up wood in the back-kitchen. Owing however to a somewhat liberal distribution of cayenne pepper, and the total absence of any other seasoning, the stew was not a marked success, though its author declared it was "the finest thing he had tasted for many a long day." Whereupon Leslie and Darrell at once, and with suspicious haste, gave up all their rights to its consumption in his favour, and contented themselves with warmed-up fowl and bacon.

Three more days passed; the frost still held, and the provisions diminished with alarming rapidity. Fortunately they had plenty of coals, for the cold was intense. The men worked steadily during the greater part of each day—not only clearing the snow from around the house, but working a path to the main road across the moor. Leslie found plenty to occupy her indoors; but flitted in and out at intervals to inspect "the work" as she called the snow-clearing. In the evenings they were all glad enough to draw round the fire for rest and warmth. And very pleasant evenings they were. There was an ever-increasing charm to both men in Leslie's innocent chatter, in her half-childlike, half-womanly ways, and in her singing. For she had offered in a *naïve* little way to sing to them, "to help to pass the time." So she sang every night. She had a sweet, touching, bird-like voice—a voice that found its way at once to the heart and stayed there.

It was, then, the fifth day of Miss Heath's sojourn in the little household, and it was Sunday. After the eight o'clock supper—Leslie would not allow it to be called dinner—they were as usual gathered round the fire. The lamp was unlit, for oil was scanty and therefore precious. Candles too, were few. And as Leslie said, firelight was good enough to talk by.

"Are we to have no music to-night, Miss Heath?" Darrell asked rather reproachfully, when they had sat silent for some time.

Leslie was sitting on the fender, burning her bonnie little

face at the fire. At Darrell's words she looked up with sweet serious eyes and said :

"I can't sing songs, you know, as it is Sunday. I never do. And I suppose you wouldn't care for hymns?"

"Why should you suppose that?" he said in a curiously gentle voice. While Carruthers said bluntly :

"We had rather you sang hymns than didn't sing at all. Please do, Miss Heath."

And Leslie clasped her little hands round her knees and sang, with an earnest, absorbed, almost childlike unconsciousness, the old, sweet, familiar hymns which never grow really old for any of us; and as she sang, both men seemed carried back—back—through the long years, to their boyhood and childhood.

"Thank you," said Carruthers in a low tone, when at last the sweet voice ceased.

Darrell did not say anything. He was leaning back in his chair, with folded arms, and rather a stern look about his mouth.

"I always sing to Aunt Priscilla on Sunday nights," said the girl dreamily, after a pause. Then she added, "And I always read her a chapter from the Bible, too."

"Will you not read to us also," said Darrell suddenly, after another short silence. There was an indescribable softening in his deep voice as it came through the firelit dusk. His face Leslie could not see, for it was in deep shadow.

"Yes," she answered at once, "if you wish it. There is a Bible in my room. It is yours, is it not?" looking at Darrell.

"Yes," he answered, "it is mine."

"I will get it," said Carruthers, rising and going out of the room. In less than a minute he was back again,

"No, don't light the lamp," said Leslie. "I can see quite well." Then she opened the book, and began to read, choosing a short chapter in Isaiah. The grand old words fell with a strange, solemn significance from the girlish lips, thought at least one of her listeners; and he became conscious with a sharp, sudden pang, of the wide terrible desert of years, and follies, and sins that lay between this pure, childlike, innocent little soul—and his own. Then he thought of his mother; it was more than twenty years since she had given him that little book—twenty years!

"*And sorrow and sighing shall flee away*," read Leslie, as she finished the chapter and closed the book.

This time it was Darrell who thanked her.

Shortly afterwards she said good-night and went to her room.

"What a dear little thing she is," said Carruthers tenderly, as he came back to his seat again, after opening the door for her. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes," was the terse answer.

"What an iceberg you are, Darrell," went on Carruthers with some impatience. "About women, I mean."

"Ah," said the other indifferently. "Just hand me my pipe, will you—and the matches. Thanks."

There was a somewhat lengthened silence; then Gilbert said suddenly:

"Look here, old man, I'm going to tell you something that will make you think me an out-and-out fool."

Darrell took his pipe more firmly between his strong white teeth. He knew what was coming. But he did not say anything, and Carruthers continued:

"Now, if you had told me last Sunday that in less than a week I should be more hopelessly hard hit than ever I was in my life, I should simply have called you an ass."

"Much obliged," said the other curtly.

"I should, really," went on Carruthers, absently taking up the poker and raking out bits of glowing coal from between the bars of the grate. "The fact is, old man, I'm as deeply in love as any schoolboy."

Darrell received this announcement in perfect silence.

"Hang it all, Lance, you might show a little interest!" burst out Gilbert in an aggrieved tone.

"My dear fellow, you must remember that, as yet, I have no peg to hang my interest on, so to speak," returned Darrell in rather a strained voice. "Am I to understand that you have—fallen in love with Miss Heath?"

He got out the last words sharply and almost roughly, as if they hurt him.

Gilbert paused in the act of lighting his pipe and nodded. "You've hit it," he said then, as he threw away the match. "The thing is—has she—would she think anything of me?"

"Well, I suppose you hardly intend ascertaining her views on the matter in the meantime?" observed Darrell shortly.

"Do I intend being a howling cad?" was the indignant rejoinder. "Of course I shall wait till we get out of this confounded hole—if we ever do." Then, after a pause, he went on almost boyishly, "I say, old fellow, do you think I'd have any chance?"

"I see no reason why you should not," was the answer in an odd voice.

Carruthers leant his elbow on his knee, and stared into the fire. Then he said:

"Upon my soul, as she sat there reading and singing to us to-night, with that babyish seriousness in her eyes—bless her!—I tell you, Darrell, I could have taken her in my arms and kissed her, the little darling!"

He stirred the fire into a rousing blaze as he spoke, and smiled—a little caressing smile. Darrell altered his position slightly, but he did not speak, and the other proceeded:

"I've fancied once or twice, you know, from her manner and that—that perhaps I might have a chance. Eh? What do you think?"

"How the devil should I know?" returned Darrell suddenly and savagely. "The girl has not confided in me!"

"Well, you needn't flare up like that about it," observed Carruthers, after surveying his companion in undisguised amazement for perhaps a minute. "Dash it all, we've always been chums, and I naturally thought you——. But, of course, it's no matter," he broke off rather huffily.

Darrell laid aside his pipe—it had been out for some time—and rose to his feet. The firelight flashed full on his face, and Carruthers exclaimed hastily:

"I say, old chap, are you ill? By Jove! you look uncommonly queer!"

"Ill—no," said the other, speaking seemingly with an effort. "I've felt rather done-up all day, though, somehow. I think I'll go to bed."

Leslie noticed next morning that Darrell was unusually silent, even for him, and he was never a talkative fellow. She also noticed that his breakfast consisted of half-a-cup of coffee and nothing more. They breakfasted in the sitting-room that morning, for the kitchen chimney had taken to smoking violently.

"I say, Lance," said Carruthers, when the meal was over, and Leslie had flitted away to the kitchen, "are you afraid of the provisions giving out altogether, that you took no breakfast? We've still enough for a day or two. Miss Heath found two more tins of tongue this morning."

"No, it isn't that," said Darrell, who was leaning back in his chair, looking wretchedly white and ill. "But I have a most infernally sore throat, and feel so completely done up I can scarcely move. Don't worry me, there's a good fellow. And don't say anything to Miss Heath."

But Miss Heath saw for herself that Darrell was looking very ill, and that as the day advanced he looked worse. His voice, too, grew hoarse and thick, and finally almost inaudible.

"You have got a shocking cold, have you not?" she said, looking down at him anxiously as he sat shivering over the fire in the winter dusk.

"Yes, I suppose I have," he answered, trying to smile. "I feel regularly flooded."

Some hours later, when Leslie had left the room to see about supper, Darrell rose suddenly.

"I say, Gilbert," he said faintly, "I can't sit up any longer. I feel awfully ill; and I don't want any supper. Make my excuses to Miss Heath, will you?"

"Poor old chap! you do look bad," said Carruthers in a concerned voice. "Is it your throat?"

"Partly. Besides, I am horribly sick."

"Have some brandy," suggested the other.

"No, thanks. I can't swallow anything." And he went languidly out of the room.

So Gilbert and Leslie had a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and rather a silent one.

Darrell was very ill all night, and in the morning was quite unfit to leave his bed.

"I can't get him to take anything," said Carruthers to Leslie, after breakfast. "I tried to give him a teaspoonful of brandy—he's been so sick, you know; but I don't think he can swallow at all now. And he seems so awfully weak; he can hardly lift his head. I can't understand his losing strength so in the time."

"I hope it is not diphtheria," said Leslie, speaking almost in a whisper, and turning very pale. "It begins just in that way. And it is such a swift, insidious thing. I had a cousin who died of it; and she was only ill a few days."

"I don't know what it is," said Carruthers gloomily. "I don't like his looks, anyway. His throat has been bad for some days, he says, but he thought it would pass off."

* * * * *

"I say, old fellow," muttered Darrell late that night, when the other had been vainly persuading him to have a spoonful of tinned soup he had heated for him, "keep away from me as much as you can. I know what this is now. It's diphtheria, and it's horribly infectious."

"Oh, no, it isn't, old man; it's just a bad cold, you know," said Carruthers hastily. But he felt more alarmed at Darrell's looks than he would have cared to own; and, as a matter of fact, he was beginning to feel queer enough himself, for his own throat was just sufficiently painful to render swallowing a very disagreeable necessity, and his limbs felt as tired and heavy as though he had been walking for days.

"I wish there was anything I could do," he went on in a troubled voice.

The other smiled faintly.

"Leave me alone, there's a good old chap," he said wearily and indistinctly. "It's no use. I don't think I shall see another night. This sort of thing loses no time, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Darrell," remonstrated Carruthers. "Why, we'll have you as well as ever in a couple of days," he added, with a poor attempt at cheerfulness.

In the morning, however, Darrell could not speak above a whisper, and hardly that. He was not unconscious, but utterly prostrate and powerless. He shook his head when Carruthers brought him a cup of coffee, and altogether seemed so far through, that the other went back to the sitting-room with a terribly anxious look in his bonnie blue eyes, and a curious, unwonted tightening at his heart. For they had been friends, indeed almost brothers, since their school-days.

Leslie looked up quickly as he entered.

"How is he?" she asked, in a voice that shook perceptibly.

"Very bad," was the brief answer.

"Is he worse, do you think?" she faltered.

"He's about as bad as he can be," he answered in a choked voice. He bit his lips nervously, and then burst out, "Oh, I say, Miss Heath, I can't help thinking it's all up with the dear old fellow. You've no idea how ill he is. He says himself he'll not last through another night. Good God! it's awful to be shut up here—to see him die before our eyes——" He stopped and took a gulp of coffee.

While he was speaking Leslie had half risen from her chair, nervously grasping the table with both her hands.

"Do you mean—that he will—*die*?" she gasped.

Carruthers rose too, with a gesture of alarm and dismay.

"Miss Heath—Leslie—good Heavens! how white you look! You are not going to faint, are you? Let me get you some water or something."

"No—no," she whispered. "I—I am not ill. Dying—you say! Dying! Ah, no—no. It would be too cruel. Oh, surely you can get some help," she went on wildly and passionately. "Surely you will not let him die without making an effort, at least, to save him! Why don't you? He will die—he will die! Oh, it is cruel!"

She threw herself into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Carruthers grew very white.

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely. "What is it to you—his life or death?"

She made no answer; but he could see that she was trembling violently.

"Do you mean," he said, speaking very slowly, and with long pauses between the words, "that you—care for him—that you—love him?"

She looked up then, her eyes dry and tearless, but full of a maidenly indignation at the ruthless question.

"You have no right——" she began in a breathless whisper.

"Answer me," he interrupted her harshly.

Then all at once she broke into bitter weeping.

"I don't know—I don't know," she sobbed wildly. "But if he dies—oh, if he dies my heart will break!"

The next moment she was gone, and Carruthers was alone.

He stood quite still where she had left him. The room seemed to grow suddenly dark. He groped his way to a chair and sat down. "If he dies my heart will break!" The sweet, childish tones, vibrating with a new fierce note of woman's passion, rang in his ears still. He had half-suspected for the last day or two that Darrell cared for Leslie, but never that she cared for him—

never. He hid his face on his arm, feeling curiously tired and sick. He sat quite still for some time, and when he raised his head his blue eyes were a little misty, and his lips were trembling.

Now, if any one had had leisure to think of the weather this morning, they would have noticed that the wind had changed during the night, and that it was thawing rapidly. Carruthers' attention was drawn to this fact by a stray sunbeam shining on the opposite wall, and it strengthened his already half-formed resolution.

"Poor little soul!" he muttered, as the girl's great despairing eyes seemed again to look into his. "Well—her heart shall not break if I can help it."

He rose, crossed the hall, and entered the sick man's room. Darrell was lying quite still, seeming to breathe with painful difficulty. His eyes were closed, but he opened them as Carruthers came to the bedside. The latter bent over him, and moistened his lips with brandy. Darrell thanked him with a look. He was past speaking now. Carruthers replenished the fire, and went slowly out of the room; then he got on his boots wrapped himself in his overcoat, and provided himself with a stout walking-stick. As he passed the door of Leslie's room he paused, fancying he heard a sound of stifled sobbing. But as he moved away the door opened and the girl came out. Her eyes were swollen and she was very pale, but on seeing Carruthers she flushed up suddenly. He took her hands in his, and drew her gently into the sitting-room.

"I am going to Princetown to get a doctor," he said very quietly. "It is thawing rapidly, so I daresay I shall manage very well. Shall you be afraid to be left alone—until I return?"

"No—no," she answered with a little sob. "Oh, Mr. Carruthers, forgive me for my hasty words!—forget all I said—I did not—"

"My dear," he said unsteadily, "I have nothing to forgive."

She hesitated a moment, then she said, with earnest, troubled eyes raised to his:

"May I—may I take care of him till you come back? He—he might die there, all alone. And," eagerly, "you need not be afraid of infection for me. I had diphtheria once long ago. And I was with my cousin when she died, and I never took it." There was a pathetic quivering of the tender little mouth that was almost too much for Carruthers. He passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

"It is an awful risk for you," he said in a harassed kind of voice. "But—I must go—it is the only chance for the dear old fellow; and as you say, he ought not to be left alone. I hope I shall only be away a few hours at furthest; but if I should not

get back before dark, will you light the little lantern and put it in the loft window? I don't know that there is much you can do for Darrell," he went on with a half break in his voice, "except give him a spoonful of brandy from time to time, if you can get him to take it. There isn't much, but I will bring some back with me. And—keep away from him as much as you can; there is no use running any needless risk." He tried to look and speak as usual, but he did not succeed very well.

Leslie looked at him anxiously.

"You are not ill, too, are you?" she said.

"Oh no," he answered in a quiet voice. "Now, good-bye for a few hours. No, don't come to the door; it is too cold for you."

As he spoke, he pulled his tweed cap well over his forehead, and buttoned his coat up to his neck.

"God bless you, my darling," he murmured under his breath, as he turned away. Then he passed out into the chill air of the winter morning. He had rather the wind had been a little less keen, for his head ached, and his throat felt abominably stiff and sore. But he pulled himself together, and plunged away through the snowdrifts, the first of which took him up to his waist, and the next nearly to his neck. However, a hundred yards or so from the house walking became less difficult, the snow barely reaching his knees.

After a few minutes' hesitation Leslie opened the door of the room where Darrell lay, and went in. It was no time to think of conventionalities, the poor child reflected feverishly. He was ill—alone—perhaps dying, and (here a rush of crimson stained her cheeks) she loved him. She had almost loved him before she knew him—this hitherto unknown hero who had saved uncle Jim's life—and his grave, tender, chivalrous thought and care for her had done the rest. She knew now why the past few days had seemed so strangely happy to her; and why the possibility of his illness ending fatally filled her with such a terrified, dreary sense of desolation.

He opened his eyes languidly as the door opened, and a dark flush rose to his face when he saw who his visitor was. His lips moved, but soundlessly, and he made a weak gesture as though to motion her away from him.

"Hush! you must not try to talk," she said very calmly and steadily. "I am going to take care of you until Mr. Carruthers comes back. He has gone to Princetown for a doctor. The snow is rapidly melting, and it has begun to rain, so he will not be very long away. You need not fear infection for me," she added, noting the distressed anxiety in his eyes; "I have nursed people with diphtheria before, and never taken it." Then she moistened his lips with brandy, shook up his pillows, and gently sponged his face and hands. He was too weak to gainsay her, indeed, he appeared to grow momentarily weaker, his breath came in short,

quick gasps, and after a time he hardly seemed to notice that she was in the room.

With a choking sob she went back to the sitting-room. There was nothing she could do—nothing. Only wait. Almost mechanically she cleared the breakfast-table, and turned her attention to the fire, which had burned rather low. Carruthers would be cold and wet when he came back, she remembered. When he came back? Would he get back in time? *Could* he? She absently crumpled up a piece of an old newspaper, and was about to thrust it between the bars of the grate, to coax the dying fire, when a few of the printed words caught her attention. Smoothing out the paper, she hastily scanned the paragraph, which ran thus:—

"The value of common flowers of sulphur in cases of malignant sore throat is becoming daily more fully recognized by the medical faculty. Even in the last stage of diphtheria, when used as a gargle, or in extreme cases—where the patient is unable to gargle—sprayed upon the throat, it has been known to eat away the false membrane which is the peculiar characteristic of this disease, and give speedy relief." Then followed directions as to use, &c.

Leslie dropped the paper, and rose quickly to her feet. She stood quite still for a minute or two, pressing her hands to the sides of her head in confused, anxious thought. *Where* had she seen a little paper packet labelled "Flowers of Sulphur?" In another moment she was in the kitchen, wildly rummaging in the drawers. After searching in vain for some time, she suddenly, and with a quick little cry, pounced upon a small, crushed-up paper packet at the back of one of the shelves. It was labelled "Flowers of Sulphur." There was not much, but there was enough. She put a teaspoonful in a wine-glass, and filled it up with water, for milk she had none. The sulphur obstinately floated on the top, of course; so she mixed it after a fashion with her finger. Then she went back to Darrell. He shook his head when she explained to him what she wanted him to do. He was feeling too horribly weak to desire anything but to be left alone.

"But see," she pleaded, "I don't want you even to try to swallow it. Just hold it in your mouth, and let it lie on your throat only for a few seconds. I will lift your head. Ah! will you not try—just to please me?"

Her eyes were full of tears; and Darrell seeing them—and because he loved her so he could have refused her nothing—did as she bade him, not once, but many times. Without going into further medical details, I may say that the remedy had the desired effect. In the course of a few hours he was able to speak, though only in a whisper, and in another hour could swallow a little soup. This last was painful to him beyond expression; but he would not for worlds have grieved his gentle nurse by saying so. He asked

anxiously once or twice if Carruthers had returned, and Leslie went again and again to the outer door to see if there was any sign of him. But all was still, save for the drip of the fast-melting snow from the roof and the surrounding out-houses.

The day wore on and died; and still Carruthers did not come back. Leslie lit the little lantern and placed it in the loft window. Then she made herself a cup of coffee; for she had tasted nothing since breakfast-time.

"I am horribly anxious about you," Darrell murmured restlessly, when he had watched her light the candle, sweep up the hearth, and prepare to torture him with more sulphur. "I ought not to allow you to come near me, but——"

"But you can't help yourself, you see," she said with a miserable little attempt at gaiety, as she lifted his head on her arm.

"Dear little child!" he whispered, looking up at her with a sad tenderness in his sunken eyes. "How can I thank you for all you have done for me. If I get well—I shall owe my life to you."

Leslie laid his head gently back on the pillows again. Then, quite suddenly, she burst into tears and ran out of the room. Darrell thought she was anxious about Carruthers' safety, and he turned over and hid his face on his arm with a weary sigh. For himself, he didn't much care just then whether he got well or whether he didn't. Indeed, if he had had any choice, he would probably have preferred the latter, being weak to wretchedness, and wofully heartsick besides.

Eight o'clock—nine—ten. Still Carruthers did not come. Leslie fancied Darrell's voice and pulse had grown perceptibly weaker, though, after the last application of sulphur, his breathing had been much easier, and he could swallow liquids with less difficulty. But the girl knew that now, more than ever, it was of the last importance that he should have constant nourishment. And, alas! she had given him the last of the brandy an hour ago. She had no more soup for him either, the little jar of Liebig was empty. As the hours went on a kind of sick despair came over her—a terrible sense of her own impotence.

About midnight she opened the front door and looked out. It was a dark, starless night, and raining heavily. But no sound of footsteps or voices came through the darkness. She closed the door with a sinking heart, and went back to Darrell's room again, her childish face white and set, and hopeless. For she had lost all hope now. He was lying quite still—so still that Leslie felt her heart almost stop beating. Had the end come so soon? She knelt beside the bed in an abandonment of grief and terror, and gazed wildly into the sick man's changed, haggard face—the face that in those few short days had become so inexpressibly dear to her.

He did not breathe.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, "have you left me then—and I love you so—I love you so!" And she hid her face in her hands in a tearless agony of sobs.

Darrell's voice made her start violently. His eyes were open, and shone with an infinite love and tenderness.

"Leslie!" he murmured indistinctly, as she seized his hand, and (hardly knowing what she did, poor child, in her passionate relief) held it to her lips. "Leslie—my dear little one—it is—too—late——" His voice died away; his eyes closed.

"*Lancelot!*" she shrieked, in a paroxysm of mingled grief and uncontrollable physical fear. "Speak to me—just one word!"

He did not answer. She laid her little hand on his heart. It was still.

Then she knew that he would never speak to her again.

She could not cry, and was conscious of a vague wonder that she could not. Trembling in every limb, she crouched close to the bed, her eyes fastened on the worn, still face of which she already felt a nameless fear. And yet she dared not go out of the room. A nervous horror of she knew not what possessed her, and froze her blood. Darrell's watch lay on the dressing-table; its loud ticking was distinctly audible through the stillness. The rain swept at intervals against the windows. The candle burnt down in its socket. The kitchen clock struck one, and the sound seemed to echo eerily through the silent house.

All at once there was a sound of voices and trampling feet outside—the noise of an opening door—a hurried exclamation—and the next moment Carruthers was in the room, followed by a dark, keen-eyed, elderly man, who went at once to Darrell's bedside.

"Is he alive?" exclaimed Gilbert hoarsely, "or are we too late?"

Leslie, who had risen slowly to her feet, looked at him with stony, tearless eyes.

"You are too late!" she moaned drearily. "Too late—too late!"

"Nothing of the kind," broke in the doctor's kindly voice. "He'll do yet. Give me the brandy, Mr. Carruthers, and tell your man to heat some water. We'll bring him round, please God."

And they did bring him round. He had a splendid constitution, and he rallied wonderfully.

But Carruthers, who had shown powers of endurance almost superhuman in the face of the pain and weakness he had sternly combated for so many hours, now gave in suddenly and utterly; for the fell disease which already had him so firmly in its grasp, would be held at bay no longer. By the next morning he was unable to speak; and almost before they realized that he was in danger, he was beyond all human help. He bade no farewell to

the girl he loved, or the man whose life he had saved, but passed almost imperceptibly from a heavy dream-like stupor into death itself.

As for Leslie, she did not even know the poor fellow was ill until he had been dead some hours; for when she heard that Darrell still lived and that he was out of immediate danger, she crept away to her own room and lay down on her bed, utterly worn out and exhausted. And as the doctor forbade her entering the sick-room again, she consented to take the sleeping-draught he prepared for her, and slept soundly and dreamlessly for many hours. And for that sleep she never quite forgave herself. She felt certain she could have saved the one life as she had saved the other.

She went home that same afternoon—the afternoon of Carruthers' death, I mean—escorted by Wellings; and Aunt Priscilla, who had been mourning her as dead, received her with tears of joy. When Miss Carlyon heard her niece's story, she insisted that Captain Darrell should be removed to The Grange with as little delay as possible, where she nursed him into convalescence herself, assisted, after a time, by Leslie.

Carruthers' death was a terrible blow to Darrell. He went abroad as soon as he was strong enough, and remained away for a year. But he carried with him Leslie Heath's promise that at the end of that year she would become Leslie Darrell.

And she kept her word.

They are exceptionally happy, both in themselves and in their children, the eldest of whom bears the name of the brave fellow whose memory will always live, undimmed and unforgotten, in both their hearts.

And the memory is a very sad one.

MATCH-MAKING.

EVERY ONE is connected more or less intimately with the great industry of match-making. It is all very well for confirmed bachelors and serious old maids to scoff at the occupation which to materfamilias becomes an all-absorbing passion. They have had a hand in the business at some time or other of their lives, and perhaps have burnt their fingers like a dabbler in stocks and shares who woos fickle fortune in the amatory bowers of Capel Court. Jones of the 50th Plungers wouldn't hang a millstone round his neck, not he; yet he knows full well that had not little Jenny Sprightly jilted him for that muff Morgan of the Flint Fencibles, he would have joined the company of Benedicts years ago. Priscilla Prude never made a match, but she did not fail for want of trying. It was only after years of patient but futile siege to the hearts of wealthy widowers and impecunious curates that she at length formed her unalterable opinion that all men are brutes.

Some make their own matches in secret; others have them made by scheming mothers and provident fathers with a degree of undisguised publicity that imparts a lively commercial spirit to the transaction. The process has as many different aspects as there are participators in its pleasures. It may be seen in active, economic and simple operation on the balmy summer evenings in the suburban parks, where three couples exchange their honeyed vows upon the accommodating plank of a single seat. It may be watched in all the refined and delicate manœuvres of its practice on the most highly-developed diplomatic principles in the crowded drawing-rooms of London when the season is at its full. Whether treated as a mere pastime or as a fine art, match-making in an inflammatory sense is indulged in by peasant and prince, by dairymaid and duchess; in a combustible way, its votaries are somewhat restricted as regards class and locality.

If Banquo had lived in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and had ridden out to Bow instead of through the park at Inverness, how different might have been the answer to his demand:

"Give us a light there, ho!"

Instead of the murderer's steel, he might have received that unconsidered but necessary trifle—a match. In their way the match-makers of East London are more interesting than their

fellows in the service of Hymen. The toilers at the great factories at Bow Common and Fairfield Road gained a passing notoriety a few months since by indulging in the expensive luxury of a strike at the instigation of a band of Socialists. How unjustifiable was the revolt is shown by the eagerness with which the strikers resumed work when their false friends deserted them. When they were "out" the newspapers devoted columns to their conduct in idleness. A glance at their methods and manners when fully employed, as at present, in their humble but useful calling is surely a more profitable undertaking.

In giving a brief account of the process of match-making as carried out by Messrs. Bryant and May, one can hardly make a more fitting commencement than by referring to the timber yards in which the raw material is stored before the nimble-fingered workers have brought their wondrous machinery into play. At the wharves by the Lea side at Bow, six or seven acres in extent, huge stacks of wood, 30 feet in height, cover the ground in enormous quantity. The stock of Canadian pine for the splints and of spruce for the boxes is valued at £35,000. During the busy season from June to November, as much as seven or eight thousand pounds' worth of timber from Canada is delivered weekly. For a builder or cabinetmaker such a stock might not be unusually large, but when associated with match-making the idea of vastness it conveys is overwhelming.

The first building to which the visitor is taken is the saw-mill. A machine is planing down the rough planks to an ivory smoothness at the rate of 40 feet a minute. The next operation is that of cross-cutting the wood into blocks, double the length of a finished match, which are then placed in steam chests for half-an-hour to render them soft and moist. In this shed a little machine is busy making bottoms of match-boxes at the rate of 200 a minute. Passing to a second room, one sees and marvels at the work of fifteen or sixteen machines which are making splints. After being steamed, the match blocks are cut up by a single operation into these splints or dummy matches of double length, each machine producing 12,000 a minute. The slightest imperfection in the wood is noticed and rejected by the apparently intelligent cutters, which to the uninitiated resemble common chaff-cutting machines. The newly-made splints are gathered up by boys who, by a rapid turn and shake, remove all dust and refuse and then tie them in bundles of 4,000. The number is not counted, but is insured by the unerring accuracy of the lad's grasp in forming a bundle. The splints manufactured at Bow Common supply only one half of Messrs. Bryant and May's requirements, the remainder being imported from Canada. In this department a dozen machines are cutting and shaping match-boxes, some making the outsides and others the drawers or insides. With one boy to manage it, each machine turns out 200 per

minute. Outside the building are drying stoves, twenty in number, each measuring 15 feet by 12 feet and 12 feet in height, which are heated by steam to a temperature of 85° or 90°. In a third shed some very interesting experiments in match-box making are in course of trial. Spruce, the wood generally used for the boxes, is necessarily cut square. Other timber is here cut from the round log into the "ribbon," or thin strips which fold up into boxes, just as silk ribbon is unrolled by a draper. The logs are in lengths equal to four breadths of box "ribbon," and are rapidly cut down to the core by the new machines. The long thin strips are then cut into proper lengths, a gross at a time. A considerable extension of this process will shortly be effected, and machines have been made which will strip the bark off the logs in a similar manner.

Until a comparatively recent period the whole of the boxes made at Bow were put together at the workers' own houses, but the nature of the surroundings and the limited space available, rendered the work unsatisfactory alike in quality and quantity. It was therefore determined to start a box factory in which the work could be better performed in every respect, and about 60 girls are now housed in a large, bright and properly warmed and ventilated building in which they have every facility and ample room. The beneficial effect of the change upon the health of the girls is evident by their rosy cheeks and high spirits. By hand work a very clever girl can finish as many as fifteen gross boxes a day of "common work," ten and twelve gross being an ordinary rate. Five operations are performed in this department:—1st, "bending" and putting bottoms in the "drawers;" 2nd, putting labels on the outside case; 3rd, putting on sandpaper; 4th, fitting drawers into the boxes; 5th, tying up into packets of four dozen. Some new machines are being tried which turn out boxes papered, folded and fixed, at the rate of 50 a minute, while others label 85 in the same time. Power for these is supplied by a gas engine, and even the paste used is milled and "boiled" by machinery.

In adjacent rooms girls are preparing the boxes for the Fairfield factory, and in another "spills" and pipe lights are being made from waste material, and stacked by the hundred thousand.

At the Fairfield works are the business offices in which a staff of 50 clerks is employed, and some idea of the magnitude of the establishment may be gathered from the fact that four clerks are occupied in preparing the wages sheets of the workers alone.

Opposite the wages offices are solidly constructed cellar-stores, built of brick and iron, in which are kept the crude paraffin, glue, chlorate of potash, gums and other chemicals used in match-making, as well as piles of bales of cotton, weighing from 2 to 3 cwt. each, of which the body of the wax match is made. In the factory large copper vats are filled with the finest white wax, melted by steam,

&c. The bales of cotton are wound over large drums until the centre is reached; the strands being separated into 100 threads composed of about 20 ends each. The drum is then unwound and the 100 threads are passed through a bath of the melted wax, at the bottom of which are holes of the exact diameter of the taper to be made. When the waxed threads fill up the holes the taper is finished, and they are, after five or six dips into the bath, finally wound, always to the number of 100, round a drum and stored away ready for cutting into lengths. There is no hard manual labour for the girls in this place, all they have to do being to watch the threads and pull out faulty pieces. The machines do all the rest.

Cutting the finished wax taper into match lengths is an exceedingly pretty operation. A flying knife cuts the tapers running off the drum seventy two times, in a few seconds, thereby producing thousands of match lengths, which a girl meanwhile fixes into a frame ready for dipping. The frames are about 2 feet square, each match being fixed in firmly in an upright position and separated by a small space from its neighbour. About a score of these machines are at work. The "dipping," or heading with the composition which ignites the match upon friction being employed, is then performed. The composition in a moist state is placed in an iron trough or bed, the quantity being regulated by a gauge at each "dip." A "frame" of matches is then allowed to fall into the trough to the required depth, and when removed in about eight or ten seconds each match has a head on its shoulders ready to flare up when struck as readily as any Welshman. The dipped frames are then placed in drying rooms, small chambers built of brick, with iron doors, in which revolving fans are hard at work. In case of an accidental ignition the door can be closed and the matches can burn quietly out without doing further damage.

In the box-filling rooms some 300 girls are engaged in removing the dried matches from the frames and putting them into the various tasteful little boxes which are so familiar. It is hardly possible to believe these are the "white slaves" about whom the Socialists raised such indignant cries. They are remarkably merry considering their state of bondage; they are chatting and singing away and look very strong, well and happy as their fingers deftly cram the vestas into their last resting place. Occasionally a boxful will ignite and the girl calmly holds the flaring mass until the composition is consumed before attempting to extinguish the matches. The waste is put into a pail provided for the purpose, and as wet flannels and water are ready to hand no danger of a general conflagration need be feared. The lassies are quite in the approved fashion of Oriental London. They have dark hair and plenty of it and every one has a thick fringe over her forehead. They may not be strictly handsome, but there is a robust honest comeliness about these girls which tells a pleasant tale.

In the "nursery" of the establishment are the young learners. These little people receive four shillings a week while being taught the rudiments of match-making, and at first they contrive to waste a deal of material. Soon, however, their fingers get accustomed to the work and their wages rise in proportion to the improvement. Good work is essential to Messrs. Bryant and May, who are only too glad to pay as high wages as the girls can earn. Many of the children after a few months' practice earn six and seven shillings a week. There are "hands" at work who have had four or five elder sisters at the factory. Among the elder workers service often is counted by years, and one forewoman, by no means past middle age, has had twenty one years' experience in Messrs. Bryant and May's employ, and nearly all the girls of eighteen or twenty years of age have been brought up from childhood within the factory walls. In the large filling rooms the matches are "boxed" on the ground floor and packed upstairs in convenient galleries. The quickness of the packers is marvellous, the boxes being put up in packets and parcels with amazing rapidity. For sending out the matches are put into zinc-lined cases containing twelve gross boxes. Thousands of millions are shipped abroad, and each case bears the date of packing, so that its owner is never in doubt as to the age of stock, &c.

No more delicate and beautiful operation is performed in this factory than that of "braiding" fusees. The wooden stem in long lengths is placed in an upright position and gradually drawn through a machine whereon eight threaded bobbins dance and play around and weave a mesh about the stem, embracing two fine wires which lend additional strength to the slender strip of timber. In the fitting shop, a great deal of machinery is made and repaired, and as it contains a forge very little smith's work has to be done outside. All over the factory hydrants are placed and a special supply of water from the mains affords ample protection against fire; the appliances used are made to fit those of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

Following his guide the visitor next reaches the mixing room, in which all the chemicals are weighed out and mixed; the great object to attain being uniformity in the proportions of the composition. One day a red "dip" will be supplied; another, blue will be required, the colours and quantities being regulated by the factory demands.

The wood match factories are four in number and are built of solid brick and iron. In the first, 250 machines are at work on splints, manufactured at Bryant and May's Bow Common works already referred to. The first operation is to form the splints into "coils" corresponding to the "frames" of the wax matches, preparatory to dipping. This is effected by placing the splints across a narrow band of webbing and rolling it up until a firm circular block is formed in which something like 5,000 splints are

fixed at regular intervals. It is then levelled to absolute uniformity by a kind of light steam hammer. The ends of the splints are made hot and dipped in melted paraffin and are now ready to receive their "compo" heads. This process is similar to wax match dipping, with this difference, that both ends have to be dipped as the splints are as yet two matches in one. After one end has received its modicum of "compo" the coil is sent a journey along a travelling endless band down to a second dipping bath, the short transit sufficing to dry the heads enough to enable the second operation to be performed without damage to the first. Both ends having been properly dipped in the igniting preparation, the double-headed matches are put in the drying rooms. When a batch is sufficiently dried there is a "giving out" of coils to the "boxers," who come up in single file to the drying room to receive each her coil. The girls next remove the dried double matches from the coils in an ingenious machine exclusively used by Messrs. Bryant and May, and they are then ready for cutting in two, to make single matches and putting into boxes.

At the filling tables the operator has before her a pile of empty boxes and a supply of finished double matches. With the left hand she opens a box, with the right she grasps a certain quantity of the matches and places them in a mould, through the middle of which she rapidly passes the knife, and instantly she has before her exactly the quantity of single matches required to fill her box, which she does in two turns of the hand. The girls who do this work have nearly all been some years at the factory, and their wages often amount to 13s. 6d. to 16s. 6d. per week. The foremen and forewomen know all their "hands," and treat them with kindness and consideration, and the firm gets good work in consequence.

Vesuvians require three dips to give them finished heads, two for the black "fizzing" part, and one to add the "priming," or igniting compound. When drying in the store, the odour given off is very pleasant, being caused by the cascarilla and other scented materials with which the heads are perfumed.

The "safety" matches, for which Messrs. Bryant and May obtained a patent many years ago, are made of the finest selected materials. The brown composition upon which it is necessary to rub the match to cause ignition is put on with brushes by hands carefully selected to insure the best workmanship. Every box when filled is wrapped in tissue paper, and a skilled hand can wrap 60 gross per day. The tin box-cases, one of which is inclosed with every dozen boxes, are made at Reading, and are specially decorated by a direct printing process. In the packing galleries the "safetys" are parcelled and labelled with even more care than is given to the commoner sorts.

Quitting the match factory, the wondering visitor is taken through vast warehouses, where cases are piled up ready for load-

ing into vans. In the upper stores are quantities of tin goods, including baking pans and trays, in which Messrs. Bryant and May deal. The stationery store is filled from floor to ceiling with stacks and piles of covers, labels, placards and paper of all kinds. Material is often ordered by hundreds of tons at a time. Among the labels are those for the different brands of matches, such as the "Safety," "Pearl," "Tiger," "Run-away," "Ruby," "Lion," and "Domestic."

The box store is perhaps the most striking example of the magnitude of the work done at "Fairfield." In a building 480ft. long by 80ft. broad, and 30ft. high, are stored many hundreds of thousands of grosses of boxes. Of this quantity many come from the Continent. In a second store are some 170,000 gross of round boxes. The stables have accommodation for 36 horses. Several foremen and responsible servants live on the premises, so that the factory is neglected neither by night nor by day. On each side of the principal entrance gates are rooms in which the *employés* are searched before leaving the factory, and it is gratifying to learn that instances of theft thus brought to light are extremely rare.

The total number of persons engaged at the factory exceeds 1,400, the large majority of whom are girls. Many of them attend night schools in connection with neighbouring churches, and at a recent distribution of prizes, the manager recognized sixteen or seventeen of his girls among the successful competitors. An estimate of the daily output at the works shows some extraordinary results. Of wax matches 7,000 frames per day can be finished, and as each contains 7,200, the daily total would run into millions. More than 100,000 bundles of splints, or double safety and other wood matches, containing each 2,000 splints, or 4,000 matches, are made every day in the four factories, giving a total of hundreds of millions.

It should be added that the development of this and other native industries at the East End of London would supply the best possible means for alleviating the widespread destitution of this portion of the metropolis. It goes without saying that in direct proportion as employment is found for the people, poverty and discontent must be reduced, but it must be owned that manufacturers are heavily handicapped. When about 40 years ago the late Sir Robert Peel succeeded in inducing Parliament to abolish duties on an immense number of articles, he scarcely realized the possibility of other countries not treating us with generosity similar to that which we were to exhibit to them. Having on one memorable occasion drawn a vivid picture of the enormous wealth and resources of this country, he addressed a passionate appeal to the House of Commons, and exclaimed: "View this matter, I implore you, by the clear, calm light of reason, and say, is yours the land to dread competition from the foreigner?"

Here the whole matter may be said to be focussed. Neither Messrs. Bryant and May nor any other English manufacturers dread the competition of the foreigner. All they ask is to be put on the same level with him, and then there will be no cause of complaint ; but to admit free of duty the manufactured article of a foreigner who refuses to admit our products without a heavy tax, is certainly neither free trade nor fair trade. If the British consumer is patriotic enough to insist upon using the home-manufactured article alone until the foreigner admits our manufactures free, enormous impulse will be given to our trade, and thousands of hands that are now idle will find profitable work during the coming winter, and Christmas time, instead of being a period of misery and want among the working classes, will once more be an occasion of rejoicing and good-will.

DUCHESS FRANCES.

By SARAH TYTLER,

AUTHOR OF "CITOYENNE JACQUELINE," "SAINT MUNGO'S CITY," "LADY BELL," ETC.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO THE CITY.

FRANCES had relations not far removed in blood, and as near her in point of locality as the City of London was to the West End. Her aunt, Elizabeth Jennings, of Holywell, a daughter of Sir John Jennings, Frances' paternal grandfather, had married, in the previous generation, one Francis Hill, a Turkey merchant, whose place of business and his dwelling above his warehouse was near the sign of the "Goat" in Speedwell Lane, leading out of one of the main thoroughfares.

There had been no opposition made to the marriage at the time it took place, neither had it been considered derogatory to Elizabeth Jennings's station in life, but Goodman Hill had never prospered as he ought to have done. His speculations in carpets and drugs had gone all wrong. Further he had added to his delinquencies the crowning misdemeanour of joining the extreme sect of Anabaptists, to which, no doubt, Colonel John Hutchinson and his wife, Lucy Apsley, had given in their adherence while he was still the governor of Nottingham Castle, and she the governor's lady. But the polite world in general looked on the Anabaptists as something worse than sour narrow-minded fanatics, as closely allied to the Fifth Monarchy men who had in the last reign brought England to a pretty pass with their rebellious machinations. It was all very well to talk of Sir Harry Vane's having met his death on the scaffold with the courage and resignation of a gentleman and a Christian; nevertheless, it was the next thing to high treason to meddle with Anabaptism in the earlier years of Charles the Second's reign.

For this reason, among others, Madam Jennings had told her daughter there was no particular occasion for her to seek out sister Hill, her husband and children. They were not to hang like a mill-stone round Frances's neck to spoil her swimming. She had *carte blanche* to have nothing to do with these froward, unlucky persons.

But the readers of Frances's story so far, must have missed one of the clues to her character already sufficiently plain, if they are not able to understand that no risk ever deterred her from doing what she had the smallest inclination to do, and that any thing of the nature of a prohibition was more likely to provoke her to take the step which was forbidden, than to deter her from it.

Thus Frances, in the state of restless dissatisfaction in which Harry Jermyn's behaviour caused her to be, turning about in her mind for some fresh entertainment to distract her thoughts, remembered her poor contentious City relations, the Hills. She resolved to pay them a visit, having nothing better to do with herself one afternoon in this autumn of 1664; and she borrowed for the purpose the red velvet coach and the liveried lackeys of a complacent married woman of her acquaintance. It goes without saying that it was part of Frances' intention in entertaining herself to make a great show before her kinsfolk, and to ruffle all her fine feathers under the very eyes and noses of her psalm-singing, conventicle-attending uncle and aunt.

She enjoyed driving in state past old St. Paul's with Inigo Jones' portico, along the principal streets, between the wood and plaster houses with their upper stories projecting over the lower, darkening the roadway, and the booths below—the shops of the day, where all kinds of goods were exposed for sale, intruding into the streets in many instances—till a journey like that which Frances had undertaken involved the spice of danger so dear to reckless spirits.

There was the double risk either of the coach's sticking fast between the intervening obstacles, or its encountering an opposition coach with no space in which the cumbrous carriages could pass each other. A sedan chair or a riding horse might have been a less dignified mode of conveyance, but it would have been at once swifter and surer. In addition, Frances could have stepped into a barge at the water gate of Whitehall and landed at one of the City stairs with infinitely less difficulty; but a wilful woman would have her way.

Mr. Francis Hill did not dwell in one of the stately mansions which some of the merchant princes had built for themselves in Aldersgate Street and Old Jewry. The Hills had been forced to retreat down a lane so narrow that Frances was under the absolute necessity of leaving her coach and servants at the top. Gathering up the sumptuous velvet train in which she had arrayed her dainty person and picking her steps—luckily she had not to take many—among the dirt and refuse which littered the path, she stopped at a tall, rickety house which looked as if, like its occupants, it had seen better days. She counted the houses between it and the sign of the "Goat," a wooden-legged monster with a portentously long beard, and knew she had reached her destination. In spite of the vanity and ostentation

with which she had carried through her expedition, there was something in the girl's heart which made her sorry for a moment.

She entered without a challenge by the shabby double doors, standing half open, ascended the unwashed, dilapidated, ill-smelling stairs, passed the half-empty, unfrequented ware-rooms which were on the ground floor, and arrived at the family residence. It consisted only of a few rooms scanty of furniture and common conveniences, but crowded with human life. The wooden panels were unpainted and unpolished, the chairs were rush-bottomed, the tables, chests of drawers and beds, which jostled each other promiscuously, were of the commonest description. The presence of poverty, grinding and pinching, was unmistakable, and in its stern company were not merely the severe-minded, heavy-hearted husband and wife, but a large small family. For Mrs. Hill, as if she had not misfortunes enough without bringing more mouths into the world than she had food to fill them withal, was in the habit of yearly presenting her disconsolate husband with a fresh baby.

The house in Speedwell Lane was a contrast with a vengeance to the court splendours of Whitehall, even to the rustic dignity and what was for the most part the rough plenty of Holywell.

Both husband and wife were at home. He was a gaunt man, rugged in feature, clad in a threadbare coat of sad and sober hue without lace at the seams. He wore no ruffles at his wrists, no buckles to his shoes, not even a riband tying back his hair, which was cut short in its grizzly stubble as that of any Round-head of them all.

She was a little less uncompromisingly plain in her dress, for women will hanker to the last after food for their vanity and tokens of the rank to which they believe they have a claim. But her saracen petticoat had been scoured and patched not too neatly, her muslin apron and cross-over were soiled and crumpled, as might well have been expected in a hard-beasted matron who had to be, to a large extent, mistress and maid, cook and nurse in one. She had not been altogether unlike Frances in Mrs. Hill's youth, but her once dazzlingly fair complexion looked as if all freshness and brilliance had been washed out of it. Her blonde locks had once been her glory also, and she still made a desperate effort to friz and pile them up *en tête-de-mouton* under her little round cap, but the whole structure was a good deal tumbled and disordered; and Mrs. Hill in her half-slatternly pretensions to a lady's toilet, with a fretting, meanly-clad baby in her arms, was a yet more forlorn figure than her husband.

A considerable cluster of the Hills' offspring, gaping and staring in the primitive rudeness of young people whose seniors have neither the time nor the spirit to teach them manners, the boys in dirty little coats and darned knee-breeches, the girls in the shabbiest of frocks down to their heels, with their hair pushed

back under linen caps without borders, completed the not very alluring company.

If Frances was not allured she was taken aback and softened for the moment; she sat and talked quietly enough to her aunt of Holywell and St. Albans, which Mrs. Hill had known well, of how her father fared, and Bab was grown, and little Sarah would make two of the cousin nearest her age in London here.

Mr. Hill twirled his thumbs, listened and prepared to cut in and have his turn in the conversation. He was a man of a melancholic temperament soured by adversity, and the sight of Frances Jennings decked out in all her maid of honour finery was gall and wormwood to him. "So, niece," he said at last from his seat in the window which commanded a view of the top of the lane with Frances's borrowed coach surrounded by a crowd of ragamuffin urchins and idle 'prentice lads, "I may take it for granted that it doth please thee profoundly to drive here in thy gaudy shell and make sport for all the silly children and older sons of Belial, in this end of the City."

To tell the truth the poor man was not unmoved with secret satisfaction on account of the very equipage which was standing at the head of the lane. His neighbours must have discovered it by this time, and have ascertained that it had come with fine company for him and his wife. He was even anxiously debating within himself whether it might not help his stranded credit if the coach could be got to tarry, an obstruction to the narrow entrance, for an hour or two, twice the length of time Frances Jennings was likely to stay. At the same time he took what indemnification he could find for his misfortunes in having his fling at the extravagant show he was fain to believe he despised.

"To be particular, sir, you ought to add the daughters of Jezebel to the sons of Belial," said Frances, quite ready to take up the cudgels and speaking pertly and with a titter. Several dawdling, draggled women had joined the circle round the coach, and no sooner had its vicinity become known to the flock of boys and girls in the room than they dispersed like the wind, the girls as well as the boys. They were first heard tearing tempestuously down the stair, and next seen scampering wildly up the lane to the object of irresistible attraction.

"Wife," said Mr. Hill sharply, "you ought to keep the children in better subjection. It is not meet that they should run wild in the lane with all the gutter fry."

"Indeed, then, husband," answered his ordinarily submissive partner, roused to lively indignation, "I wish you would take the matter in hand yourself, for I vow I have enough to do already. There is this poor sickly babe, with the kitchen fire to keep in when wood is scarce and dear, and the larder not over well filled to meet such appetites as you will not find between this and Bow.

Not a soul have I to help me as you know right well, save Cherry Norton and Moll Trip. What harm are the poor young things doing—sure they have little enough chance of diversion—by just running out to look at their own cousin's coach and horses? At least they are yours for this afternoon, as you tell me, niece Frances."

"Harm or not," Mr. Hill hastily put an end to the discussion, "it is no great entertainment for a fine young lady to treat her to our straits and squabbles. When I come to think on't, niece, thou must needs be well inured to such silliness as our young folks practise. I am confidently told there never was anything sillier or more childish than the pastimes which your idle courtiers affect, when they are not steeped to the lips in wantonness and debauchery."

"Roundly, sir, I cannot say whether your tirade be directed solely against men or whether it do take in women. I would leave the men to defend themselves; as for the women," continued Frances with an exaggerated assumption of artlessness, "I must own that we do play blind-man's buff sometimes, and I have seen Mrs. Stewart building houses with cards."

"To crumble and fall, madam, like the house built on the sand," said Mr. Hill with a groan; "and we are bound not to question that great will be the fall thereof."

"But the sea must rise and the wind blow first," argued Frances glibly and undauntedly, "and I for one see no sign of a coming storm. We have got rid of our troubles with the usurper and his bands of cut-throats and regicides; were they better than the courtiers who play blind-man's buff and the maids of honour who build houses of cards?"

"That is a matter of taste," said the gentleman gloomily. "I hold that the one is the natural consequence of t'other. But as for a sign——"

"Lord, there be some Jeremiahs who are always prophesying evil," the girl interrupted him with flippant rudeness for a court-bred young lady.

"No sign!" persisted the husband and wife in one breath and of one mind now, "why, the whole air is full of portents. Is it possible that you have heard nought at Whitehall of the comet which is to be seen nightly blazing over a doomed city?"

"Yes, I have heard tell of it," said Frances doggedly, "and Bab writ about it from Hertfordshire, so that Holywell and St. Albans are doomed as well as London. The king and queen sat up last night to watch the flaming monster. Oh, we are not so far behind the City as you good folks fancy, and if the thing do mean blood and fire, as some affrighted persons think, it is my opinion they will alight on the late king's murderers and the plotters and disturbers of the present king's peace. It will not harm the ladies and gentlemen who do but amuse themselves

prettily and merrily as doth become them, and give work and bread to shopkeepers and other tradespeople, and to the men-servants and maid-servants who all love to look on at the play, so that it is only scurvy knaves who cry out against it."

The gentleman was struck dumb by her effrontery.

"Niece Frances, it doth not become thee to speak in such a fashion to thine elders, and let me tell thee, madam, thy betters," interposed Mrs. Hill. "If the judgments of heaven are about to fall on them who are calling forth the lightning from the clouds, want of reverence where reverence is due is not the least crying sin of these sorry times." The good woman was standing up like a loyal wife for her husband and his principles in public, whatever liberties she might take with them in private.

"Say, rather, it becomes me to take my departure, sir and madam, after having put myself about and, it maybe, displeased some of my elders and betters to whom I am more accountable for my doings than I am to you, by coming where my company is clearly not wanted," said Frances bouncing up, rearing her beautiful throat to the utmost of her small height and preparing to go.

"Nay, wench, you will not put such an affront upon us as that of not taking bite or sup in our house," said Mrs. Hill, quickly bethinking herself of the duties of hospitality, and of the folly of mortally offending her better-to-do kindred through this skittish high-minded young Frances. "It is not much that we have to lay before you, and it may not consort with your dainty stomach, which no doubt hath been pampered within the last six months, though I know that at Holywell my sister Jennings is too wise a woman to bring up her girls on French falals and Portuguese junkets, which I daresay are the order of the day now at Whitehall in honour of the two queens. There are no venison pasties and canary here, but Mr. Hill deals in as good coffee as you can drink at court. We can even furnish you with the new beverage which men call cat-lap, and there are some saffron biscuits left over poor Cousin Perry's funeral—rest her soul! No, I did not mean that," broke off the speaker in discomfiture. "It do serve to show how my poor thoughts are carried hither and thither, when I put up a prayer for the dead. I must speak to that excellent divine Mr. Hailes to find out for me what could have brought it to my tongue's end, and made me so hugely forget myself."

Frances did not decline to be propitiated. She did not really desire to quarrel with the Hills, little as she cared for their favour or disfavour, and she hated to think that they should suppose she would not put her lips to their poor fare because she had everything which the heart of man or woman could covet in the shape of food and drink at the palace at Whitehall. She never could do anything by halves; she sat down again, spread out her velvet skirts over the rush-bottomed chair and prepared to drink Mr. Hill's Turkish coffee and to munch with no show of distaste.

the stale saffron biscuits which had been saved from Cousin Perry's funeral, and helped to furnish forth the present slender feast. She began at the same time to talk quite affably to her aunt, who was not loth to listen, of the silver lace gowns which the queen and her Portuguese ladies had brought into fashion again.

Mr. Hill too thought better of it, though he might groan inwardly over the vanity of women, even those of them who had been wedded to godly men and baptised afresh into primitive Christianity by being twice dipped in running water, at the risk of their lives, before they were received into the congregation of the saints. It was in a gruff attempt at greater geniality than he had hitherto practised that he suddenly addressed Frances anew.

"It is not so long ago since a lady of quality, and a court lady to boot, was pressing the Turkey merchants—myself among them—on a question of fashion, if you will believe me. She wished us to tell her what was the cut of a Babylonish garment of all things, in which she was minded to appear at some masquerade."

Frances began to giggle, the idea of her Uncle Hill's being appealed to on such a subject was too hugely absurd for her to preserve her gravity. Besides, she knew the whole ludicrous story and proceeded to tell it with great gusto.

Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton, granddaughter of the Earl of Abercorn, who was full of mischief and in such high favour at court that she could venture on any liberty, had forged a note of invitation to the queen's masquerade and sent it to my Lady Masquerie, requesting her to attend in a Babylonish dress. The fool was uplifted sky high, and at her wits' end at the same time. When she did show herself in her coach, it was as the wags vowed "in sixty ells of gauze and silver tissue, with a pyramid of baubles on her head." The spectators who knew anything insisted it was the mad Duchess of Newcastle. The very grooms and link boys were so beside themselves that her husband had to catch her, carry her home and lock her up before the masquerade began.

"The fun of the thing is," explained Frances, "that it is a creature as ugly as you can see grin through a horse collar at a fair, and as lame as an old horse; but it is not bad natured, neither. It is she who has lent me the coach that is standing at the top of the lane."

"Is it possible?" cried Mr. Hill more sternly than ever. "Is this what the children of this world call friendship? To make a mock of their friend before her face and behind her back? To accept an obligation at her hand, and in return hold her up to the scorn of strangers? Methinks I'd rather have their enmity than their friendship."

Frances stared, for, indeed, any standard of friendship forbidding such licence and counting it treason to good faith and

right feeling was not known at that gay, brilliant court of Whitehall.

Happily before the difference of opinion could give rise to another quarrel there was an interruption to the conversation.

The door of the room opened and a young girl in a white hood and the shabbiest of frocks entered. She could not have been above ten or eleven years of age, but her face had the same wise old woman's expression of premature responsibility and experience in the cares of life, which little Bab Jennings's face had worn down in Hertfordshire.

This was a prettier face than Bab's, with the softest curves of mouth and chin, cheeks rosy in their brownness, even under the deprivations of a city life and the bare cupboards of the house in Speedwell Lane. This child must have been like the three Hebrew children of old, able to keep fat and fair on little better than their pulse and water. One of her beauties was dark eyelashes curling up from the dark eyes which were set under the finely pencilled brows and the full ivory forehead.

As the girl stood doubtfully in the doorway, gazing with a flush of surprise and timidity at the strange sight of so fine a lady talking at her ease with Mr. and Mrs. Hill, her whole attitude and expression reminded Frances so strongly of her sister Bab that one of the best bits of the little maid of honour's heart came into her throat, and she started up calling out, "Cherry Norton, Cousin Cherry; don't you know me? Come here this instant and let us hug each other and tell each other how we do."

Cherry would not presume to take such a liberty with so fine a cousin even on her invitation, but she came stealing across the floor, let herself be kissed quite warmly and answered, "yes, cousin," and "no, cousin," to all Frances's flow of questions and remarks.

In truth the pair were not cousins, or even related to each other in the most distant degree. They were merely connected through the Hills, and the girls had met only once before in their lives. That was when Mrs. Hill had taken a journey two years before into Hertfordshire in order to beg her brother's assistance in money and credit for her husband already struggling desperately with commercial difficulties. As Mrs. Hill was burdened with the perennial baby, whom she could not leave behind, she carried Cherry Norton with her, though Cherry was but nine years of age, to be her travelling companion and act as nursemaid on the way.

Madam Jennings had taken care that only the shortest rope should be thrown to the drowning man, a longer one she maintained, probably with reason, would have tended to submerge the helper as well as the helped, but she did not decline to gloss over her refusal by playing the hostess to the disappointed applicant for the space of a week. Thus Cherry Norton came to be known to the Jennings.

It seemed that the Hills were not so poor as to escape having still more destitute dependants hanging on to their shrunken skirts. Cherry, or Charity Norton, was the daughter of an unfortunate sister of Mr. Hill's. Her husband had been so deeply implicated in the troubles of the last reign that he was one of the Puritans who, at the Restoration, was sentenced to expiate his former offences with the loss of his life, while his worldly goods were confiscated. His wife, already deep in a decline, did not survive him many months. Their orphan children were dispersed among surviving relatives too widely to have much chance of ever coming together again. One of the family, Cherry—then a mere child—had fallen to the lot of the Hills, who, to do them justice, treated her exactly like their own children, part of the treatment being the strict discipline against which the little Hills were fain to rebel. Cherry, who was older than her cousins in years and much older in mind, had no thought of rebelling. She toiled contentedly day and night, to supplement the fitful services of Moll Trip in the capacity of deputy housekeeper, cook, sewing and nurse maid—anything to aid her uncle and aunt in return for the protection and maintenance which they accorded to her.

"You must come and see me at Whitehall or St. James's, Cherry," Frances was saying in voluble, heedless patronage; "you must come and sup with me. You ask the porter at the gate for Mrs. Jennings. He will hand you over to the first groom of the chamber, or page, or lackey he can come across, who in his turn will pass you on through several more hands. You need not be affrighted; everybody will speak you fair—you are too nice, my dear, not to be well treated. Still, there's another danger—that of having your steady old-fashioned head turned with the flattery and fun of so many fine gentlemen. But somebody will put you on your way to the Duke and Duchess's rooms and to my den, where, if I'm in waiting, you'll wait till I'm disengaged. You'll choose our supper, Cherry. We'll have whatever you like to eat and drink. If you're in luck and the coast is clear, I may be able to show you the King's little dog, Cupid, or the last litter of small puppies, or the queen's closet with her pictures, or the duchess's toilet laid out for company. Trust me, child, you'll not want for plenty to amuse you, and I'll undertake that you get back here before the door is locked, without troubling Uncle and Aunt Hill, sitting there as mum as two mummers at Christmas."

Cherry had listened in silence, half dazzled, half dismayed. Now her Uncle Hill ceased to be mum.

"No member of my household, with my will, shall put a foot within that den of iniquity which men call the Palace of Whitehall, and return to corrupt the young and foolish in an honest man's dwelling," he said wrathfully.

"Husband, Francis!" remonstrated his alarmed wife, "bethink

you that you are going too far. I know that your trials and those of the salt of the earth in this unhappy country are many and hard to bear; but what you said sounded akin to treason, of which I know you never meant to be guilty, and the sound is not confined to your own family, seeing that my niece Frances here is in court service, and may hold herself bound to report your rash words. Oh, dear! sure our fortunes are at a low enough ebb, without this cruel aggravation."

"I care not," cried Hill, all the more violently for his wife's opposition. "Let who will turn traitor and tale-bearer. Worthier men than I have lost their ears and had their noses slit for speaking the truth ere now in this free country of England. If my niece Frances desires to see me suffer such indignities and atrocities, I shall not baulk her fancy."

"Marry, but it is your own morbid conceit that would have you stand in the pillory, Uncle Hill," said Frances Jennings indignantly. "I have more to do than to pay heed to every snarling, snivelling word I hear, and to carry it abroad in order to ruin the jaundiced speaker. All that I can say is that I had better be off before worse come of it, and we quarrel all round again. Aunt Hill, I'll give your service as you bade me to my father and mother when I write home. No, don't try to make things better, and don't budge to see me to my coach—Cherry will do that, if you'll let her, if you ain't afraid that I'll corrupt her in half-a-dozen steps," said the visitor, still carrying matters with a high hand, and having her own way as usual.

When Frances and Cherry were out of the house and in the street the former said authoritatively:

"Don't mind that old curmudgeon of an uncle of yours and mine, Cherry, or our stupid aunt, who could put her head into such a halter. It is not as if they were your real father and mother and you owed duty to them. Come to see me whenever you can slip away without letting them know. Do as I bid you, and I'll make you kindly welcome. I cannot keep you over the night, I'm sorry to say, for I share my room with another maid, and she might object to lie three a-bed, even for one night, but I'll contrive to get you home in time without anybody's being a bit the wiser. They need not suspect that you've done aught else than paid a longer call than ordinary on some long-winded friend of the family—the wife of the excellent divine, for instance, if he hath a wife. Serve the whole set of them right for being a parcel of rank Pharisees, and for Uncle Hill's tyranny to you and insolence to me."

"Oh! I can't, though it is so kind of you to think of my going to you, Cousin Frances," said Cherry in much agitation, as the other boldly pushed her way, notwithstanding her small stature, through the crowd, pulling her companion with her, till the two stood on the high steps of the splendid equipage, which was

creating a profound sensation in Speedwell Lane. "I have not time to thank you, as I would give the world to do, for remembering me at all, and asking me to visit you—who are in such high company, and are such a great, beautiful young lady yourself," said poor Cherry in an utter simplicity and sincerity of flattery, which, accustomed as Frances was to another sort of adulation, proved not unacceptable to her.

"You'll come, then, when I ask you," she called from the top-most step, looking back with a nod.

"No, no!" cried Cherry in fresh distress. "I could cry my eyes out, but I cannot come. For one thing, I have no pretty clothes to appear in and not disgrace you, at any place fit for you, even though it were not a palace. And you were not in earnest, cousin, I know you were not," she repeated wistfully. "You would not have me for a moment disobey and deceive my uncle and aunt, who have kept me nearly all my days and treated me as one of their own children. They are so hard pressed to find the means of living, cousin, and so weighed down with apprehension lest he should not be able to discharge his debts and pay the fines imposed on him for his way of thinking. Then what would become of Aunt Hill and the children? I know it is intolerable of him to speak so rude to you, and I felt so hot and ashamed. But we sometimes think he is half mad, poor man, and does not know what he is saying," pleaded Cherry.

"Oh! if you are that man's champion, and if you are so fond of the Hills, I need not bother my head to see more of you."

Frances was turning her back in dudgeon to step into her borrowed coach and drive off for ever and a day, when something in the piteous round face within the white hood, the tears brimming up in the dark eyes, the soft lips trembling, overcame her petulance. "Never mind, child," she said, hurriedly springing down the steps again to give Cherry a hearty kiss. "You're too like sister Bab for me to quarrel with you because of your tender conscience, which must be a troublesome commodity to take about the world with you," and Frances shrugged her slim shoulders. "But we'll meet somehow; see if we two don't be fast friends yet, in spite of anybody and everybody seeking to keep us apart. It is borne in upon me that we've not seen the last of each other. I'm not a witch, but my predictions sometimes come true; so keep up your heart, Cherry Norton, and cry a fig for fortune, when fortune frowns."

CHAPTER V.

A PAIR OF ORANGE GIRLS.

ONE frosty February afternoon in 1665, Frances was so ill-advised as to smuggle into her room—the maid of honour who shared it

with her being absent—a much less harmless companion than Cherry Norton. This was the disgraced young Welsh lady, Mrs. Henrietta Maria Price, who was not a fit companion for an innocent young girl, according to Dick Talbot's not very exalted standard of propriety.

If Mrs. Price had entertained any proper feeling—either about her disgrace or the lamentable scandal which had led to it, she would have shunned every approach to the court at which she could no longer appear in her old character, and she would certainly have shrunk from compromising by her presence the friend whose reckless, youthful generosity was only matched by her audacious rashness.

But Mrs. Henrietta Maria had no such delicate scruples, and to dare to the utmost was, as we have already seen, a strong temptation to her girl hostess. Another and still more dangerous temptation to Frances, which allured her irresistibly in more than one scene of her eventful life was any suspicion of mystery, with corresponding opportunities for clever disguises and adroit playing of parts.

Frances was in high glee, chattering her fastest, and sipping the chocolate which the queen mother had made a common refreshment among the court ladies, that was likely to keep its place against the Portuguese queen's favourite coffee and the latest fashion of cat-lap.

The couple discussed in their giddy way, and with the affectations which crop up in such light discourse, how sick the two young women were of the constant talk of fights between the English and the Dutch ships, and the glory that resulted to England when this man had his head shot off and t'other his arm carried away. The story was that all was done and a great victory was proclaimed, till the Dutch fleet sailed with their colours flying out of one of their harbours in Holland, and the whole war was to do over again.

The gossips went on to question whether Mrs. Mallet, the beauty (though they thought her none so pretty) and fortune from the North, would marry my Lord Rochester, notwithstanding the king had spoken for him.

The lively discussion was then of another beauty, Mrs. Catherine Boynton, and how men could be so infatuated as to admire her great staring eyes, and the number of times lately she had managed, in her capacity of maid of honour to the Duchess of York, to faint at the feet of Dick Talbot, who was groom of the chambers to the duke. Frances laughed immoderately at Mrs. Boynton's die-away ruses, which were so different from her own defiant tactics. Perhaps, though the huge Irishman with his magnificent swagger was a snubbed suitor, Frances' glee might have been a little less triumphant if she had seen any chance of her rival's being successful.

At last the two came to the conclusion that they must have a care of the chocolate in which they were indulging, lest it should prove as injurious as coffee to their complexions, for some of the wits pretended that it was drinking their Turkish brew which made the queen's Portuguese maids so brown. Mrs. Price was so brown already that she had not much to lose, but she entered earnestly into the question in sympathy with Mrs. Jennings, who was so fair, until the pair solemnly agreed that they would rather return to ale and cinnamon water, if they could not have a little white wine or sack whey, than make their faces as black as the soles of their shoes with the French and Portuguese drinks.

"If you were as black as some of the black boys one sees travellers bring back with them from foreign parts, I would engage to know you by the turn of your head and your teeth, which you would not think to black, and there are other of your friends who would be full as quick as I," said Mrs. Price with conviction.

"I don't believe you would." Frances immediately took up the challenge. "I could puzzle you all without so much as using soot or ink, or borrowing a man's suit. Many a time down at Holywell I have affronted and frightened both maids and men by stealing the dairywoman's cloak and pulling the hood over my head, or by dressing myself up like one of the market women in St. Albans, and feigning to have run away from my friends, and so have need to wear a muffler. The people of the house would well scold me for being late with the milk, or for having failed to bring out some confectioner's bread, or a box of dried fruit. Maybe some impudent groom or plough-boy would catch me by the hand and think to snatch a kiss, when down would go the hood or the muffler, and they would see it was their master's daughter. It was better fun than dancing Sellinger's Round with them in the kitchen at Christmas-time, and making them keep their places when they were tempted to forget themselves. Bless me! how daunted and shamed they were, and in what a scare lest my mother should find out the liberties they had taken. But I never told on them, so no harm was done, and it was hugely amusing. My father said I ought to have been a boy, when he heard on't, and my mother was amazed at such a senseless waste of time and trouble, though there was time enough and to spare down in that dull hole."

"Ah! you could not do it now, and here in London among the gay sparks we wot of. They would not be so easily set at nought and got rid of if they once found you out. You would be affrighted yourself, Mrs. Frances, to attempt such a play-woman's or school-boy's trick," asserted Mrs. Henrietta Maria with just the languid condescension and slightly contemptuous remonstrance which was the least likely to deter Frances from a madcap frolic—coarse with the strong flavour of the time and the circumstances.

"I tell you I have taken in my own sister Bab, and she not so much of a child, only four years younger than I am."

Then in the midst of her obstinate self-assertion there darted into Frances's active brain a good reason for such masquerading as she spoke of, and a mode of turning it to profit, so as to settle for ever a torturing question, which was of the utmost importance to her. Her uncertainty with regard to it was fretting her day and night.

There had been much talk at Whitehall lately of a wonderful German or Italian doctor,* who lodged with a jeweller in the City. The learned stranger was said to be an adept in astrology, who could tell people's fortunes and reveal whatever unsolved problem was wrecking the inquirer's peace. Not only had the fame of the foreign doctor travelled west, various courtiers and especially court ladies of Frances' acquaintance were known to have despatched their men and maids to seek knowledge—read riddles, procure charms and philtres, and otherwise tamper with the powers of darkness, as Francis Hill would have called the proceeding, instead of having the difficulties caused by the senders' own folly brought to the light. It was even whispered that one or two of the ladies had been so concerned with respect to the information they were to receive, and so desirous of keeping it to themselves, that they had borrowed their servants' livery, and gone in the character of their maids with the petitions they were minded to present, along with liberal fees, to the potent doctor.

Why should not Frances Jennings try something of the kind? but in order to do justice to her spirit and wit, it must be bolder and more original than anything anybody else had attempted. Why should she not thus put an end to the suspense which so weighed upon her, of which she was so passionately impatient in connection with the state of Harry Jermyn's affections and his management of his singularly measured and controlled love suit? Did the superbly supercilious woman-killer really care for the little girl or not? Was he merely trifling with her and holding her up to the ridicule of the court? If so, Frances felt furiously that she could at once tear him from her heart and trample his image under foot.

But if it were simply his dilatory shamefaced way (the idea of Harry Jermyn's being shamefaced!) of expressing his homage, because he had been himself so much made of, and if the sentence was trembling in the balance which should render this conqueror and master of other women her humble servant and devoted slave, then Frances was conscious—hanging her head while she made the admission—that though his hesitation was not altogether fair or flattering to her, she could sacrifice something of her pride for his sake. She could wait a little longer for the supreme victory of

* Grammont.

vanity and love. In the meantime she would give much, she would go a pilgrimage barefoot, or do something harder still, to have her mind set at rest, once and for all, by learning the truth from one whose occult wisdom and familiarity with the lore of the stars enabled him to read men's minds.

When Frances gave an excited hint of the project which had flashed upon her to her companion she met with no strong objection.

In fact Mrs. Price did not really wish to deter her companion from any folly of which she could be guilty. It is no lack of charity to conclude that poor Mrs. Henrietta Maria was like the fox which had lost his tail and was for ever afterwards inclined to wish that all the other foxes might lose their tails in order to bear him company. It seems more than probable that she had no great love for this rather arrogant, overbearing juvenile patroness of hers. Perhaps, in that demoralized society the elder girl bore a secret grudge against the younger, who, with all her heedlessness and recklessness, contrived to hold secure the priceless jewel of a good name, which Mrs. Price had wantonly thrown away. Unquestionably, she bitterly resented roystering Dick Talbot, of all men, setting himself up for a censor of morals and not thinking her good enough company for his cruel mistress, who with all her beauty, piquancy and court favour was but a childish hoyden after all. This is taking for granted that Dick's vicarious discretion had come to Mrs. Henrietta Maria's ears. It was more than likely it had done so, not only because it was court gossip, Frances was just the girl with little thought and less sensitiveness "to blab," as she would have said, where such a good story was concerned.

Neither of these two wise old-fashioned children, Frances's sister Bab or Cherry Norton, would have been betrayed into such carelessness and disregard for the feelings of others, but Frances, though her heart was not bad and she had some sense of honour, was very different.

To spite Dick Talbot, still more than to get a little idle excitement for herself, the discarded maid of honour was disposed to encourage her companion in her wild masquerading, while pretending to dissuade her from it. Indeed Mrs. Henrietta Maria contrived to assume the greatest reluctance to have anything to do with such an outrageous adventure, so that she was induced to take part in it simply from her doting affection for young Mrs. Jennings, and from Mrs. Price's commendable anxiety to see her young friend safely through her dangerous undertaking. The confidante ended by making the affair a joint concern in which the two would be coupled in all men's mouths, and should rise or fall together in the public estimation.

The pair agreed on the tomboy trick, that they would disguise themselves as orange girls, in spite of the difficulty presented by Frances' unusually fair complexion, which though she was

country bred, had not been tanned by sun or wind, and thus make their way to the City and consult the strange doctor. The costume to be adopted was not difficult to procure and put on at a moment's notice, since it was the dress of the ordinary not the ideal orange girl which was aimed at. A ragged skirt, a rough coat or jacket, a linen kerchief pulled well over the head and knotted under the chin completed the toilet, to be finished off with the indispensable basket of oranges. If the kerchief were voluminous enough it might in some sort replace the hood of the cloak or the neckerchief muffler to which Frances had trusted in former disguises. If her face were partially concealed, her bold carriage and excellent acting together with the basket of oranges on her arm, might enable her to pass muster. At least the kerchief would cover the flaxen fairness of the pretty hair and shade the fine outline of the face.

Mrs. Price was by nature less recognisable and better constituted to play the orange girl in her brownness and clumsiness; on the other hand, she had fewer advantages from art, since with all her wit she could no more entirely relinquish the mincing coquetish ways of her court days than she could acquire on the instant the stolid air and the rollicking horse-play of the genuine orange girl.

Both of the actors had some comprehension of what the discovery of their identity would mean, and of how mercilessly their noble associates might deal to the offenders a punishment out of all proportion to what was, after all, the frivolous nature of the offence against good faith and good manners. The witty scamps who figured at the court of the second Charles were anything save chivalrous Bayards. It was doubtful whether many of them kept even one uncorrupted spot in his heart like poor ill-named Dick Talbot, with his noble face and his vicious life. But the strong spice of risk was the last irresistible captivation to Frances, while Mrs. Henrietta Maria had little to lose in the light of an unblemished reputation.

The great chance of the pair's escaping the penalty they were provoking, lay in what was also the terrible danger to the reckless couple, in the nearly absolute darkness of the streets, and the manner in which these were given over to strange company and preposterous escapades, as well as to lawless violence of every description. As an instance of the state of the London streets, and the occurrences which took place in them about this date, an incident may be mentioned which had to do with two people much in the public mouth, whose affairs had been discussed by these young madams over their chocolate. It was only about three months later in the season, when one would have thought the longer light of the May nights might have afforded greater security to wayfarers, that Mrs. Mallet, who was known as "the great beauty and fortune of the north," supped with Mrs. Frances

Stewart at Whitehall. Mrs. Mallet was returning home, attended by her grandfather Lord Hawley, when their coach was attacked at Charing Cross by a company of both horsemen and footmen, who had been lying in wait for the prize. The lady was seized, parted from her grandfather and consigned to the care of two women, seated in a coach and six, which was immediately driven off with the victim, who could not be heard of for some time. The flagrant transgressor in this case was John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, famous alike for his sins and his repentance. He was arrested and sent to the Tower for a short time, but so little impression did the outrage make either on the King and Council, or on any one implicated in the disgraceful adventure, that not only did he escape further punishment, the very lady whose right of choice he had thus unceremoniously forestalled married him shortly afterwards.*

On this evening the Duchess of York was at the play with Mrs. Bagot and Mrs. Temple, two more of her maids of honour, else Frances could not have been so idle and mischievous.

It appears as if the simplest plan, after the two pretended orange girls had succeeded in passing unnoticed and unchecked the last porter and soldier on guard, would have been to have availed themselves of the water-gate, hired a barge and proceeded to the City by water, thus avoiding the interruptions of the streets. Even after a brilliant amendment on their original plan had recommended itself to Frances for the very wantonness of its risk, namely, that the ladies should, before going to the City, repair to the theatre and sell oranges under the very noses of the Duchess of York and the court, a barge from the water-gate to the theatre stairs—the theatre known as the Duke of York's Theatre being on the river—still presented many advantages. But for some reason best known to themselves, the adventuresses put their faith in a hackney coachman rather than in a bargeman. They drove across the park, alighted from their coach, and ran in between the other coaches gathered in large numbers about the play-house door. Certainly that was a chosen locality for orange girls, but there was reason to dread the contact of the sham with the real, and the invidious comparisons which might be provoked. Another danger in the middle of the confusion and traffic lay in the link boys, who throw sudden revealing flashes of light on the bystanders. But Frances was fired with the the sorry ambition of taking in and at some future time twitting one or other of her humble servants—perhaps that poor schoolmaster, Dick Talbot, who had thought to school her on proper behaviour—with the astounding fact, well nigh against the evidence of his senses, that she had once sold him an orange at the door of the Duke's Theatre.

On the whole Mrs. Price preferred the jostle of coaches and foot

* Pepys.

passengers to a more remote and retired spot under the circumstances. Her wit told her there was safety in numbers. At the same time, when some street ragamuffins near the girls began to quarrel, and there was the prospect of a stand-up fight, she could hardly, in spite of her bold unscrupulousness, keep from screaming, while she clung to her companion with all her might.

"Don't hang on to my arm," protested Frances in an undertone. "Heavens! did you ever see two orange girls supporting each other in such a fine-lady fashion?" She was made of stouter mould, and in her hardy country life had been not unfamiliar with the humours of the people. "Oranges, fine oranges," she called, "two a penny—three a penny," opening her mouth and stretching it to its utmost extent to increase the volume of sound with which she cried up her wares; "a dead bargain—arrived from the Spanish dons' country within the week, as juicy as ripe plums, as sweet as honey on the one side of the mouth and as sour as a good crab on t'other."

Mrs. Henrietta Maria giggled, "You do make such faces, Mrs. Jennings. You square your mouth so that I verily believe you could swallow an orange whole."

"Would you like to see me try it?" asked Frances, coming to a dead stop and making an essay to thrust an orange between her fine white teeth. "I'm not choked yet. I believe I could do it, if you would find me a small one, and call the public to witness the performance."

"No," besought Mrs. Price, alarmed at the effect of her words. "Do let us get nearer the theatre door and see if any one we know goes in or comes out, and if you like to hail him you may; as for me, I am certain I shall run away on the spot."

"That would be behaving like a Bedlamite unless, indeed, you wish him to run after you," said Frances candidly.

At that moment two men of the girls' acquaintances sauntered out of the theatre, arm-in-arm, as it was not in character for orange girls to support each other. As the light above the door fell full upon them it exhibited the familiar features of two of the quickest-witted and most graceless of the courtiers.

"Oh! what shall we do, Mrs. Frances?" cried Mrs. Price. "It is Harry Killigrew and Harry Sidney, as sure as I'm alive. I'd as lief meet the King and the Duke. If it had been any other than these two I might have stood my ground."

"But you must stand your ground," insisted Frances under her breath. "We're in for it as it is, and to do aught else will betray us." At the same time her voice failed her and she hung back involuntarily.

It was Mrs. Henrietta Maria, whose trepidation was more affected than genuine, who advanced a pace and addressed Harry Sidney:

"Oranges, ripe oranges, my fine gentleman?"

The Adonis of Charles' court was engaged in settling a curl of his perriwig, and took no notice of the applicant.

Frances would not be outdone. She was enraged with herself for her unaccountable collapse, of which, after all her boasting, she was not likely to hear the end. She offered her basket to Harry Killigrew, but still her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, and for once in her life another spoke for her.

"Will you buy an orange from a poor wench at your service?" said Mrs. Henrietta Maria, with the ghost of a simper and a profound courtesy.

"Zounds! there is something out of gear about that orange girl!" quoth Harry Killigrew to Harry Sidney, pouncing as sharp as a needle on what was a little overdone in the elaborate performance. "Her jabber don't ring right, and I declare the girl with her is seeking to hide her face. What mare's-nest is this we've stumbled upon? Hey! wench, wait till we come up and we'll buy a round dozen of your oranges, or apples, or whatever they be, though they were worth their weight in gold."

Both of the girls were alarmed by the roused suspicion in the tone of the speaker, and by the attention which his reply to Mrs. Price's call was bringing upon her and her companion from the loungers around. They were only too ready to enter unasked into such extraordinary chaffering.

Killigrew, satisfied of the correctness of his rough guess, that these were not true orange women, proceeded to address them with unspeakable grossness of insult, pushing forward at the same time and attempting to chuck Frances under the chin.

Her strange bashfulness vanished in an instant, and she blazed up, "What insolence! How dare you, sir?"

"Insolence! dare! Here's a rarity in the mouth of an orange girl!" cried Harry Killigrew with his hateful sneer.

It is hard to say how the matter would have ended, had not Mrs. Henrietta Maria at that moment espied an opening in the mob of hangers-on and the circle of coaches, leading out into the comparative obscurity beyond. She judged that discretion was the better part of valour. She trusted to good fortune and the agility of youth and took to her heels, leaving Frances no choice except to follow her. There was a shout of derision from the bystanders, who at the same time entered sufficiently into the spirit of the situation to offer no obstacle to the retreat of the fugitives from the two court butterflies and gadflies in one, in their brocade suits, with their plumed beaver hats and the glitter of their sword-hilts.

The cry of ridicule half maddened the proud, passionate girl who ran last. She stumbled as she fled, recovering herself just in time to make good her escape from the two men whom she knew, before they could further penetrate her identity. She broke through the ring of human beings—the most of them of the roughest quality

—which, splitting in two to let the girl through, closed again behind her and stopped pursuit.

But just as Frances sprang to her feet, the flash of a link upon her figure caused a man standing a few paces off to shout :

“Heyday! Here’s a fresh riddle for you to read, my masters. Do it be the custom in this wonderful city of London for orange lasses to wear diamond buckles in their shoon?”

In truth Frances, in dressing for her part, had forgotten her feet; and in place of clothing them in darned hose and clouted shoes, had retained the twinkling witnesses of her rank. But she was already out of reach, in obscurity just not too deep to prevent her distinguishing the hackney coach in which Mrs. Henrietta Maria was already ensconced.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF THE ADVENTURE.

FRANCES was ready to shed a torrent of tears of wounded maidenly feeling and intense mortification. She would have been willing to let the enterprise drop there. But Mrs. Price had recovered her complacency and spirit of adventure. It was her turn to rally her friend on being so easily cowed, and on what had been her devouring anxiety when they started to consult the foreign doctor on an affair of the utmost importance.

Frances’s pride was up in arms at the faintest suggestion of a lack of spirit on her part, and she immediately relinquished the idea of baulking either herself or her companion of the second half of the programme. Instead of driving back to Whitehall, they drove on to the address of the jeweller’s shop in Gower Street, above which the learned doctor lodged.

As the worst luck would have it, when Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Price bade their driver stop and proceeded to alight, they ran against a more disreputable and dangerous frequenter of the court than either Killigrew or Sidney. They were men of honour according to their poor lights. This Brouncker was the basest of the base, a human satyr, the degraded abettor of other men’s vices.

His attention was at once attracted by the incongruity of two orange girls descending from a hackney coach, and he accosted them in such terms that even the less innocent and more hardened of the two shrank back and was struck dumb before his vileness. He gloated over their distress, detained them long enough to be satisfied as to their identity, and then let them go with the significant reflection that maids of honour had come to a low pass.

With what confidence was left in them, the imprudent couple

knocked at the door of the jeweller's shop and there they found the bird was flown, the lodger had departed, and their errand was vain. If they had but known it, this was the greatest undeserved boon which could have befallen them. For it was discovered in due time that the foreign doctor, astrologer and what-not was none other than John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, lying *perdu* in order the better to mature his plans for carrying off Mrs. Mallet. A favourite eccentricity in his wild and wicked career was to take up his abode in circles where he was not known, and using a stage make-up, to pass himself off under any character which took his fancy. If he succeeded in mystifying some of his old acquaintances in addition to his new, the greater the triumph for him.

The masquers were not yet home in safety. On their return to their coach they found it surrounded by a street rabble with whom their too faithful driver, who was in charge of the baskets of oranges which he refused to give up, was engaged in a lively squabble. Here Frances's ready wit came to their aid, and she could take to herself the credit of getting them out of this pitfall. She tossed the contents of the baskets among the crowd, crying, "A scramble, a scramble; it is the cleverest man who beats his neighbour." The oranges went rolling into the gutter, the company who coveted them, shouting and laughing at the windfall, dropped on all-fours in pursuit of the prize, while the women sprang into the coach and were driven off.

The goal was not won even yet. Though the night was not old, a confused noise arose in the distance and drew nearer and nearer. Flying feet, with an accompaniment of yells, screams and curses warned the two girls, practically defenceless in their folly, of the approach of one of the troops of mad-drunk revellers who, under the different fantastic names of "Muns," "Hectors," or "Mohawks," for the better part of a century scoured the dark streets of London whenever the marauders chose. They grossly maltreated peaceful, unarmed wayfarers, and served as the most dreaded of scourges to respectable citizens, who were totally unable to call the offenders to account; woe betide Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Price if they fell into such hands. The pretended orange girls would be subjected to barbarous indignities to which anything they had encountered in the course of the last hour-and-a-half would be a trifle light as air. The young women's sole chance would be to escape being seen by the advancing crew, and to do this in a hackney coach with a tired horse, which could not outstrip the runners, and a driver nearly out of his wits with fright, was plainly impossible. Hastily alighting, paying the quaking Jehu, and telling him as Napoleon told the wreck of his army at Waterloo, to save himself as he best could, his freight prepared to shift for themselves.

Mrs. Price began to show of what stuff her courage was composed, that it was only fit for holiday wear, or it might be that

conscience, which makes cowards of us all, filled her at the critical moment. She took to whimpering, "We'll be robbed and murdered on the spot. Oh! why did I come out with you, Mrs. Jennings, on such a fool's errand? I'll never, never do it again."

"Hold your tongue, you goose," retorted Frances unceremoniously, for it might be a matter of more than life or death if they were heard. "Why did you come out, indeed! You won't do it again! nobody will ask you, I promise you; you are the most chicken-hearted girl I ever knew in real danger. My sister Bab, or even little Sal, would have more spirit. We've nothing about us to be robbed of." But even while she spoke she stooped down, tore the buckles from her shoes and thrust them into the breast of her jacket. "I declare, I forgot these," she explained, "though they've already been like to undo me. What stupid oversight made me come out in these, I wonder? But I can tell you they'll have to kill me first before they get them now; for they are none of your paste or Bristol stones, they are a pair of my mother's buckles, and I had as lief be killed at once as face her after I had lost them."

"Oh! Mrs. Jennings, how can you speak so light about being killed at such an hour as this?" cried Mrs. Price, with her teeth chattering at the ugly word.

"Speaking on't wont bring about the killing a moment sooner," argued Frances contemptuously, "that is if I speak under my breath. It is screeching that will work the mischief, I warn you. But the enemy is hallooing in the next street but one yet, and there is nobody going to be killed that I wot of," she added recovering her temper and her good spirits. "Let us go into this entry and keep as mum as mice. The fellows will tear by without guessing we are here. There ain't much power of observation left in men fuddled half seas over."

The narrow pitch-dark entry into which Frances and Mrs. Henrietta Maria stole ran up by the side of a barber-chirurgeon's shop with its sign of a brass basin, when there was light enough to discern a sign. From the entry a side door opened into the shop. The crouching girls were themselves not in a condition to distinguish clearly every detail of their surroundings. They failed to notice that the door on their right side stood slightly ajar so that a faint streak of light from a shaded lamp shone through the crevice. They had hardly established themselves in their hiding place and were listening panting to the approaching whoops and war-cries of the invaders of the king's peace, when an incident nearer at hand aroused fresh terror in the watchers. A hand—they did not see how little it was—crept through the narrow aperture and plucked at Frances' skirt.

Her first impulse was to shake herself free, while at the same time she clapped her own hand on Mrs. Price's mouth to stifle any scream in which that excitable lady might indulge.

"I'm here, Cousin Frances," piped a small voice through the opening which was being cautiously enlarged, while the speaker's tone sounded as if there was a world of protection in the presence that was so used to sheltering others. "Don't be angered, I could not help knowing your voice, though you spoke in a whisper. I've asked Master Gomfrey and he says you may come in here where you'll be safe. But oh! cousin, what is this?" cried Cherry Norton in bewilderment and consternation, when her invitation was eagerly accepted and the two wayfarers entered the shop where the light was burning low in order not to attract the marauders. "What are you doing dressed so mean, out in the streets of London of a night, with no better protector than—than another fine lady in the same guise?" glancing with shrewd discrimination at the discomposed Mrs. Henrietta Maria. "Did the Duchess send you out for a wager or a trick to make her some amusement? I do not think it was right or kind of her."

"Ask me no questions, Cousin Cherry, and I'll tell thee no lies," answered Frances, glancing round at the materials for shaving and "bleeding" and the bundles of herbs which formed a great part of Master Gomfrey's stock-in-trade; at Master Gomfrey himself, a stout man, in night-gown or long house-coat and night-cap, looking greatly astonished and not over well pleased at the style of his unseasonable visitors; and lastly at a sturdy lout of an apprentice with a cudgel in his hand, who stood waiting in the background.

"And what on earth are you doing here, Cherry Norton," retorted Frances, "when all good little girls are preparing for bed? What are Uncle and Aunt Hill about that you are abroad shopping at this hour? I trow it is not to make amusement for them since they are too good and wise to want amusement. Sure from whatever cause it is neither right nor kind of them to suffer such gadding."

"But I am in my thickest hood and coat," replied Cherry quite seriously, "and I have Will and his stick to take care of me. Besides it is no distance between Master Gomfrey's and home, while it is a long way to Whitehall. No, Aunt and Uncle Hill would never have let me go out for anybody's amusement, but little Peter is ill and we've nursed him all day without making him better, and it was only after it was dark that my aunt remembered a posset of Master Gomfrey's which had done the child good in a like case. Uncle Hill would have come, but he is only a man, he does not understand about children, and he could not describe their symptoms, so she thought I might venture with our 'prentice Will. We should have been home long ago only Master Gomfrey was smoking a pipe with a neighbour, and his housekeeper did not know where he was to be found, so we had to wait his return. Hark! what a noise those bad people are making out there. Oh, I do hope they will not go hallooing down our lane, or they will drive Aunt Hill out of her poor wits."

"What! because you are out? Does she care for you as much as that comes to?" inquired Frances carelessly.

"Oh! no," answered Cherry composedly, "she knows that Will and me could get out of their way or speak them fair. What do they want with a girl like me and a City 'prentice? They fly at higher game Uncle Hill says. But Aunt Hill can't abide noise and she do be so scared for the children and herself, even when Uncle Hill is in the house with all the doors locked."

"Well, there do be chicken-hearted women," repeated Frances pointedly, "and I find they generally take good care of themselves in the midst of their panic."

"The noise is dying away," said Cherry, listening intently.

"And those merry gentlemen will hardly return the way they came," suggested Frances. "I propose we rid Master Gomfrey of our unprofitable company and leave him to sup his groat porridge and go to bed. Bid you good-night, Cousin Cherry. Keep your hood close about your throat, for there is plenty of frost in the air though there is no ice on the river. Walk fast or run, if you know the way so that you cannot trip. Make Will follow hard at your heels. Good luck to your posset and better health to my little cousin Peter."

"But you cannot go away like this, cousin, dressed up in this fashion at so late an hour," pled Cherry, in a mixture of affront at seeming to find fault with a fine grown-up young lady, and precocious womanly anxiety on her account.

"Bless your heart, as if I'd go out in this dress at an earlier hour," cried Frances with her heedless laugh.

"My coat would not go on you, I can hardly get into it myself," continued Cherry in sober earnest and in much perplexity, looking down at the shrunken, shaggy garment which she had long outgrown. "I have not even my aunt's large green fan which she sometimes lends me when the sun is hot in summer."

"Oh, Cherry, what are you thinking of? A fan in winter when the sun is down! an orange girl with a fan! That would be a mighty deal worse than for her to drive in a hackney coach," remonstrated Frances.

"I thought you might have pretended to hold the fan before your face, in order not to be dazzled by the light of a lantern when anybody approached," explained Cherry, abashed at the ridicule she had called forth. "I could think of nought else at the moment; but at least you can have Will. Oh, yes, I'll give you Will," with eager satisfaction, "and he'll walk with you and the strange lady as far as the first river stairs where there are boats still going. Do you hear, Will? This is Mrs. Jennings, another niece of your master's, of far more account than I—they will tell you so when you reach home," urged Kitty wistfully, as she caught a glimpse of the glumness in Will's stolid face, at

this transfer of his services and indefinite prolonging of his attendance on one or other of his master's wandering nieces.

"Take the offer, Mrs. Frances," Mrs. Henrietta Maria lifted up her voice at last and importuned her companion. "It is too good to be refused, after all the bother we two have had this blessed night, and what we've gone through. Take it for my sake, if not for your own, after what I've risked and borne to pleasure you. The little girl, who seems in some way akin to you, and is yet used to the City, will come to no harm now that the streets are clear again. Or perhaps the apothecary," with an insinuating smile in the direction of the silent, suspicious Master Gomfrey, "will let her stay with his housekeeper for the night."

"You *are* cool, Mrs. Price," cried Frances indignantly, "to propose that I should leave a child like that, though she were in no sense akin to me, to make her way through the streets after nightfall, when I had deprived her of her escort. What dost take me for, madam? And what wouldst thou do, Cousin Cherry," turning with sudden curiosity to the girl, "if these bad people, as thou phrased it, came back, hunted thee, surrounded thee, had thee in their clutches?"

"I should just speak them fair, cousin," said Cherry simply. "I should ask them if they would be so good as to unhand me. I should tell them I was only Cherry Norton, whose uncle was Mr. Francis Hill, of Speedwell Lane, and his youngest son was ill with his mother fit to go distracted because she can't bear to see a child of hers in pain. I should say I was hasting home with a parcel of herbs to make a posset and try what that would do. Will, here, would back me that I spoke true, and don't you think they would let me go then?"

"We'll not try them, little Cherry. If we are to have the use of your man at all—I don't pin my faith to any man—Jack of them, but it appears that you and Mrs. Price do set store even on an unsprouted beard—you must come too, it ain't so very many yards to the nearest stairs. We'll see if we can catch a waterman afloat still, and then you and your 'prentice will go straight to the Hills. And mind, Cherry, I shan't forget what you've done for me this night, not so long as I live."

"Me!" echoed Cherry in amaze, for she was accustomed to have her willing services taken as a matter of course. "I have done nought. I would an' I could, but even what I might have done that you would not let me do," she finished regretfully.

"That was no fault of yours," said Frances with decision.

The extraordinary escapade of La Belle Jennings and her companion in going abroad as orange girls and attempting to sell oranges at the door of one of the theatres was not kept secret, as the performers intended it should be, but immediately got wind in various quarters. It has been many a time recorded among the mad vagaries of the maids of honour in a reign of

licence. But most of the chroniclers have neglected to state that the wild maid with whom it originated was but a high-spirited girl between fifteen and sixteen, country bred, who had not spent a year in court service. They have also nearly all failed to note that such masquerading feats with a few restrictions, no doubt, were not at all uncommon in that generation. Even the stiff little queen with her Portuguese notions of etiquette condescended to indulge in them at Christmas and at Easter. On one occasion, when it was neither of these privileged seasons, she and two of her ladies, escorted only by a couple of gentlemen, dressed themselves up as peasants and rode on pillions several miles to attend a village fair. The amateur actors tried unsuccessfully to pass themselves off as the equals and associates of the too clear-sighted country people. The queen and her party were stared at, pushed against, run after like a show, until they had considerable difficulty in regaining the country-house which royalty was gracing with its presence.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

LAST month I indicated, in a rather mysterious manner, that something new and extremely beguiling was in preparation for ladies of the Amazonian persuasion. Never have fair huntresses enjoyed better opportunities of looking their very best; and what can possibly excel the "best" of a pretty woman in a well-made habit, seated on a thoroughbred horse and gently trotting to the meet on a sunny winter morning? This season the "get-up" is more than usually becoming. The sensible riding-jacket is still the correct garment to wear over the habit-skirt, which is still made short and business-like for hunting. The favourite waistcoat is made of plush—a thoroughly comfortable material which is warmly protective of lungs and chest, and is at the same time very becoming, especially the soft, silky gloss of that which recalls the aspect of the beaver riding hats worn in the last century. Busvine is making these in a way that seems peculiar to himself, and which brings out the best points of the figure, while it disguises deficiencies. In the same way, the riding jackets are cut with the skill that comes of a perfect acquaintance of anatomy, combined with a perfect ideal of what each figure should be. It is unnecessary to remark that few figures are moulded upon thoroughly well-proportioned lines. Here and there, a few times in a life-time, one sees a woman whose outlines are faultless and whose grace of gait and harmony of gesture come of the perfection of her form. The rest of humanity needs the touch of the skilled hand to render the lines harmonious. That is why so many women look unusually well in their habits. These beautifully modelled riding jackets are cut a little longer this season than they were last, and those that Busvine makes fasten upon the chest, but permit the waistcoat of plush or doeskin to be seen at the neck and waist. White doeskin under a pink coat and fastened with dainty little monogram buttons, is the chief note of a smart as well as neat hunting costume. Only last week another life was saved by his patent safety skirt, which ought to be worn by all women riders. It is impossible for the foot to be caught in the stirrup if this skirt be worn, and it has already prevented many serious accidents.

The London autumn season has been a pleasant one, with many people in town, endless concerts, much entertainment of a social sort and almost a plethora of afternoon at homes. The theatres are doing almost more than their duty by the public. So numerous are the plays produced that it is difficult so to sort out one's evenings as to manage to see them all. There are many estimable persons who can go out every evening of the week to dinners, dances, theatres, concerts and at homes, and yet get up to breakfast regularly in the mornings and feel "fit" for the day's pastimes or business pursuits. But we are not all constituted in such enduring fashion. To some of us two or three quiet evenings in the week are indispensable, and a little quiet time in the day as well. Is there anything more absolutely refreshing, or better tending to serenity of mind than the after-dinner hours spent in the home with some favourite book, while "the children are asleep;" or an hour of the day passed in pleasant solitude when we may gather our thoughts together, letting them think themselves out as it were, and develop into small plans and projects which will not be wooed in the ferment of a tumultuous life? It is to such a quiet hour as this that many an one may trace the first germ of the best work of his life; the first thought of that picture that afterwards made his name; or of that book which will remain when the others are forgotten.

Let us suppose, then, that we may devote two evenings a week to the theatre, having already laughed unto tears over Mr. Penley in "Uncles and Aunts," and Mr. John Hare's miseries in "Mamma;" enjoyed the marvellous spectacle of "The Armada," at Drury Lane, and once again lost our hearts to "Joseph's Sweetheart." Among the new productions is "Faust up to Date," at the Gaiety, in which Miss Florence St. John's lovely voice is to be heard nightly. The burlesque is by Messrs. Sims and Pettitt, and the fun lies in the contrast between the mediæval flavour of Goethe's story and the every-day commonplaces of modern life, as wittily introduced by the authors. Miss St. John lends much charm to the part of Margaret modernized and does every justice to Herr Meyer Lutz' pretty music. Mr. Lonnen, as Mephistopheles, has a song called "Ennisworthy," which rivals his famous "Killaloo." There are pretty scenery and pretty dances, and the lover of burlesque is thus well catered for.

"Nadgy," at the Avenue, is of French extraction, being an adaptation by Mr. Alfred Murray of M. Chassaigne's "Les Noces Improvisées." The music of the new comic opera is bright, pleasant and tuneful, and though the scene of the play is laid in Hungary, there is little attempt at local colour in the music. The Hungarian and Austrian uniforms introduced provide abundant colour of another kind, and brighten the stage most effectively. Mr. Arthur Roberts makes more fun out of his part than even the author himself could have expected. No one should fail to see

Miss Vanoni perform the American "kick," or to hear her sing in the duet "Tzig-a-zig." Girls in ballet dress who do not dance are a novel feature of the new comic opera.

"Hands Across the Sea," at the Princess's Theatre, is likely to remain for many months upon the boards of this comfortable and convenient house. The author is Mr. Pettitt, who has provided a strong drama full of exciting incidents, and skilfully put together. In point of scene, there is abundant variety. The audience find themselves in Devonshire, Paris, on board a steamer bound for Australia, in Sydney Harbour, in Paris again, and a second time on board a steamship. Mr. Henry Neville is the hero, and Miss Mary Rorke is charming in the pathetic part of his wife. Mr. Garden and Miss Webster are a delightful relief to the pathos of the play, their comedy scenes being taken in a bright and lively key. Sir Morell Mackenzie's son, who has for some years been acting under the name of H. H. Morell, has an amusing part in "Hands Across the Sea."

At the time of this writing, both the name and date of production of Mr. Gilbert's new play at the St. James's are unknown, though the announcement of both is promised shortly by the acting manager, Mr. George Coleman.

Playgoers have two great pleasures before them, though not precisely in the near future. One is Miss Ellen Terry's assumption of the part of Lady Macbeth. Even this repulsive character her genius will manage to invest with something winning and lovable. One can fancy the pathos in her voice and the horror in her face as she eyes the blood-stains on her hand. If anything *could* lend a charm to this most gloomy and miserable of plays (full of bad weather, too!) it will be Miss Ellen Terry.

The second pleasure to look forward to is also connected with a repulsive play. Mrs. Bernard Beere is to play "La Tosca" at a London theatre, and though her art will render it an intellectual treat, nothing and nobody could ever make the play a pleasant one. However, there is a taste just now for the horrible. It is in fashion, and what can stage managers do but cater for their public and its moods?

Mr. Hawtrey's new burlesque, "Atalanta," at the Strand, has had the advantage of Mr. Lewis Wingfield's clever fancy in designing the scenery and costumes. This sums up, I believe, all the theatrical news available at the present moment. Nor is the sum a meagre one.

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